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Short Stories

Nov 25th

Twice A Month

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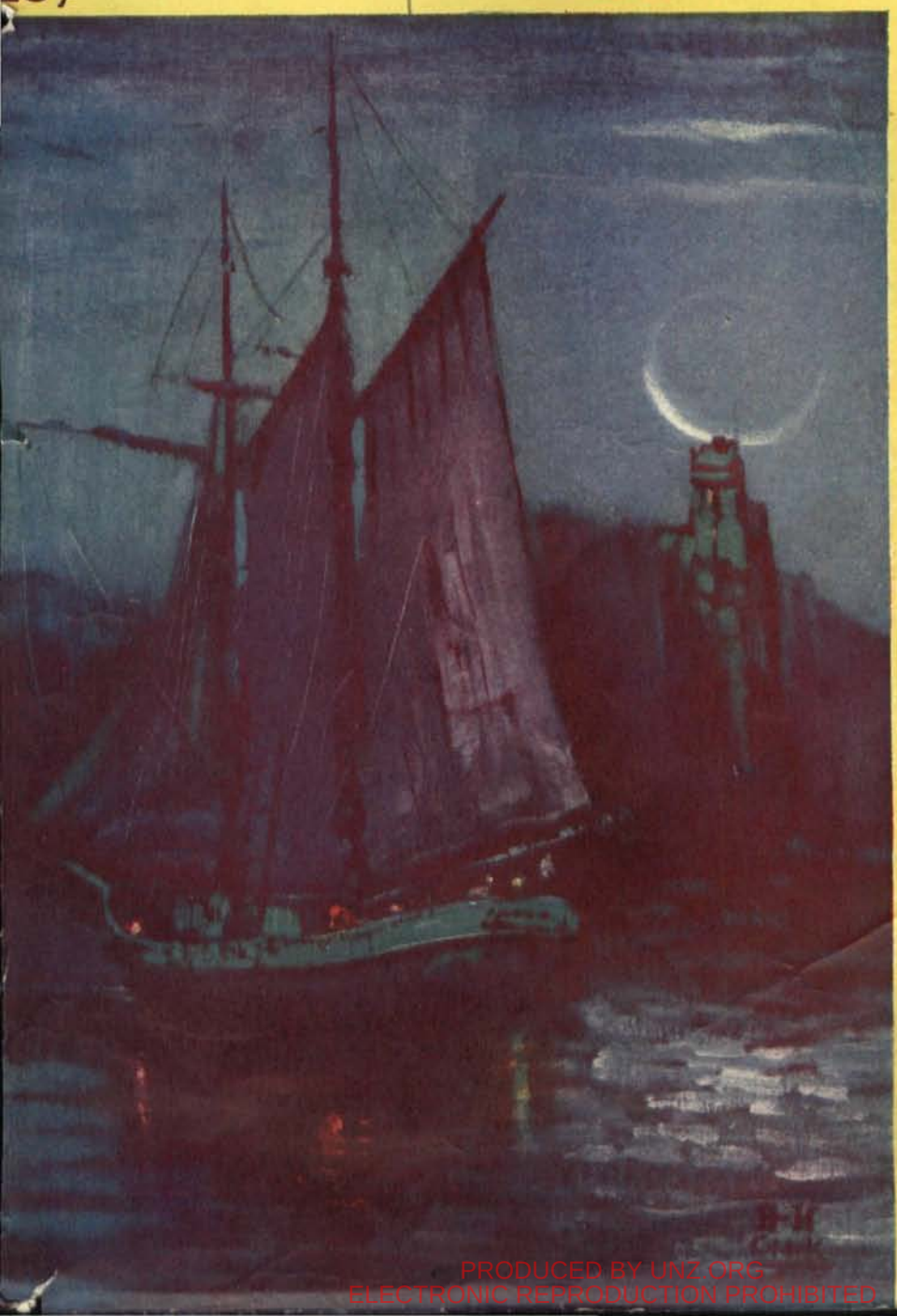

A new moon on its back over the Mediterranean; an ear at every keyhole!

THE TILTED MOON

A new serial of intrigue and adventure

by

BARRY PEROWNE

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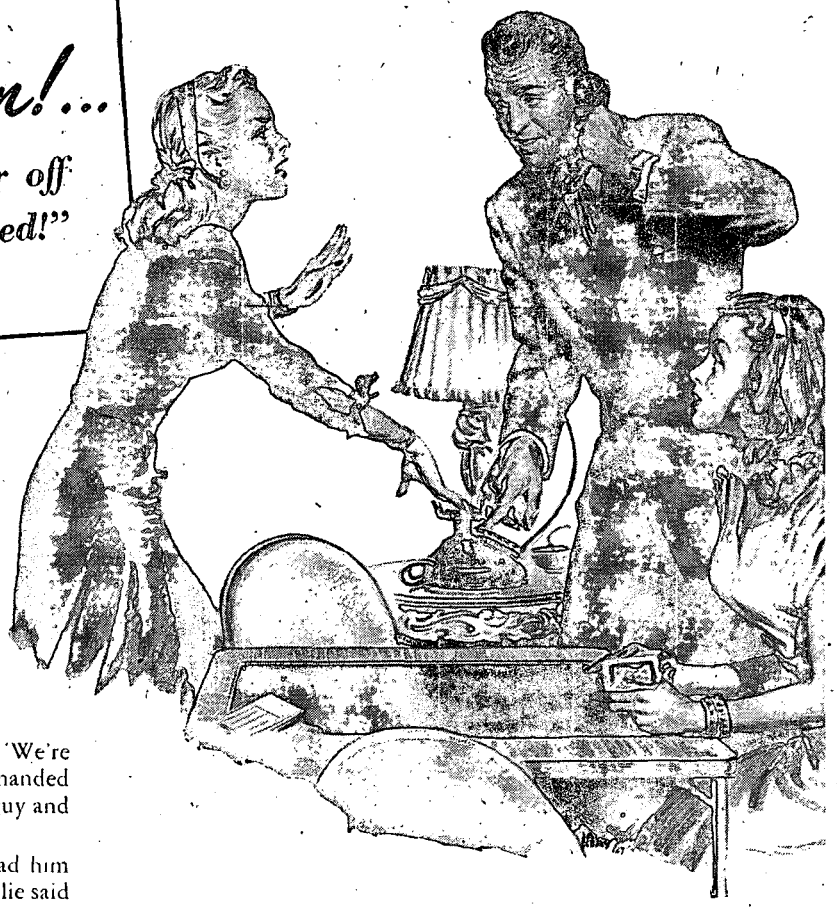
"Not Him!... we're better off three-handed!"



"WHAT do you mean 'We're better off'?" demanded Bill. "Dick's a charming guy and plays like an expert."

"I guess you haven't had him for a partner recently," Millie said knowingly.

"I guess I haven't. So what?"

"Well, I have! Over at the Club a week ago I sat in for a hand or two and, honestly, Bill, he was pretty grim. And both Myrtle and Charlie Hall noticed the same thing when they had him for dinner and bridge Monday night. His breath . . . his breath . . ."

"Oh, oh!" said Bill, "Now I catch on. Too bad somebody can't slip him a hint . . . and a bottle of Listerine Antiseptic."

"It really is," said Millie, "because he is such a peach and I hate to see him riding himself right out of the picture."

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The insidious thing about halitosis (bad breath) is that you, yourself, may not realize that you're guilty. So, it is very easy to offend the very people whose friendship you value most.

Isn't it foolish to take such chances when Listerine Antiseptic is such an easy, *extra careful* precaution? You simply rinse the mouth with it and, presto! . . . your breath becomes fresher, sweeter, less likely to offend.

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P.S. IT'S NEW! Have you tried Listerine TOOTH PASTE, the MINTY 3-way prescription for your teeth?

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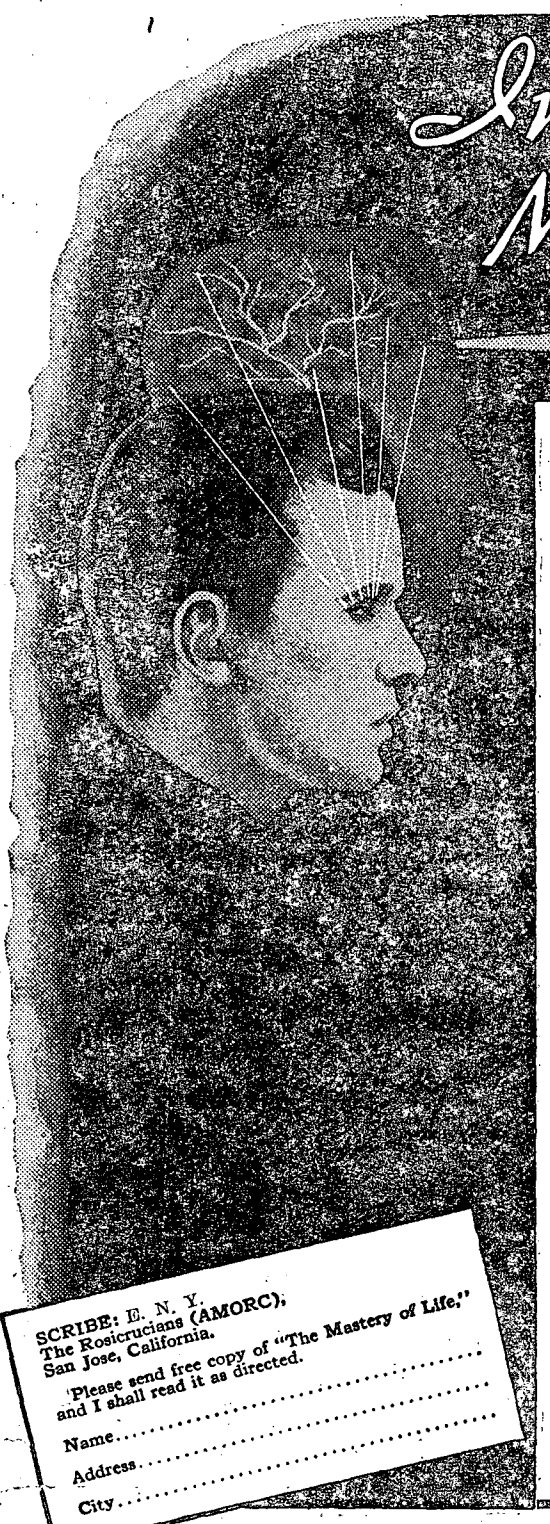

The Secret of MENTAL CREATING

IF you just like to dream, read no further. There comes a time when your fancies *must be* brought into light—and stand the test of every-day, hard realities. Are you one of the thousands—perhaps millions—whose thoughts never get beyond the stage of *wistful wishing*? Do you often come to from a daydream with the sigh, "If only I could bring it about—*make it real?*"

All things begin with thought—it is what follows that may take your life out of the class of those who hope and dream. Thought energy, like anything else, can be dissipated—or it can be made to produce actual effects. *If you know how to place your thoughts* you can stimulate the creative processes within your mind—through them you can assemble things and conditions of your world into a happy life of accomplishment. *Mental creating* does not depend upon a magical process. It consists of *knowing how* to marshal your thoughts into a power that draws, compels and organizes your experiences into a worth-while design of living.

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Short Stories

TWICE A MONTH

THE BEST OF AMERICA'S ACTION ADVENTURE MYSTERY

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If the Pen Is Mightier Than the Sword, as Has Been Said Quite a Few Times Over the Centuries, Then The Letters It Writes Might Well Be Potent as a Powder Keg

SHORT STORIES issued semi-monthly by SHORT STORIES, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City 20, N. Y., and entered as second-class matter, November 24, 1937, at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION PRICE in the United Stats, American Possessions, Mexico and South America, $5.00 per year; to Canada, $6.50; and to all other countries, $6.00. Price payable in advanced. November 25, 1948. Vol. CCVI, No. 3. Whole Number 1028.

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EDITOR
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ASSOCIATE EDITOR
LAMONT BUCHANAN

November 25th, 1948

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EVERY AUTHOR'S FINEST AND LATEST STORIES NO REPRINTS

Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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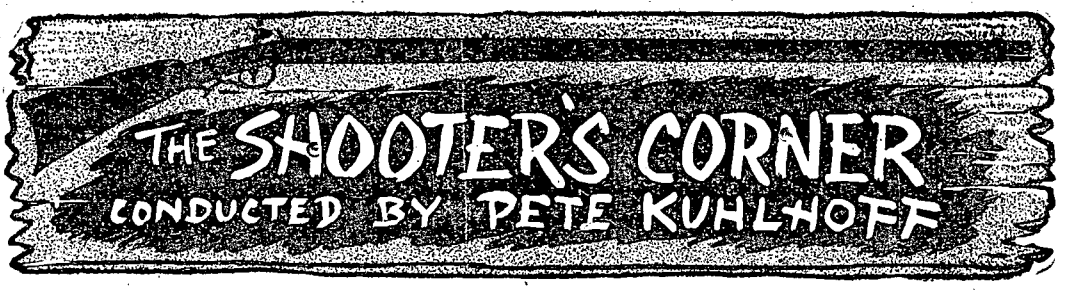

Scatter Shots from the Mail Bag

A Fine Book

The Infantry Journal Press has published a new book for the National Rifle Association. It is titled "How to Shoot a Rifle," and it is a dandy. The price is $1.75.

I'm telling you this first because if you are a rifle shooter (target, hunter or plinker) you should rush out and buy, borrow, beg or—I was going to say steal it, but maybe I'd better not—anyway, get a copy and read it.

And if you really want to be a top flight shooter, you will study this little book until you really know everything in it.

The following paragraph from the foreword gives a good idea of what to expect. "HOW TO SHOOT A RIFLE" will not make you a master shot, but it will give you the background and information necessary to learn how to shoot or how to get the most benefit from a course in shooting. It is really a combination textbook for the student and handbook for the instructor!

Before giving a brief outline of the contents of this book (it's heavy paper bound, I wish it were cloth, has 62 8½" x 11" pages, is beautifully designed, layed out and printed in two colors, with many drawings and photographs) I want to say that for the past 25 or 30 years I have read every book about rifle shooting that I could get my hands on and for my money this is the best one I have run into. It is easy to read and quite complete. During the war, life would have been much easier for the small arms instructor had this book been available.

The first chapter gives the reader a very good picture of the aims of the shooting game. Following chapters cover the history of the rifle, including types of rifles, the modern rifle itself (in detail), ammunition, safety and etiquette, ballistics and testing, range and target constructing, equipment and its care, a brief description of the N. R. A., plus a glossary wherein the terms and slang of the shooting game are explained.

But the bulk of the book is devoted to the actual problems of shooting, and believe me everything is thoroughly covered and with plenty of detailed photographs and drawings.

If you can't buy it from your local book dealer, send $1.75 to the N. R. A. Book Service, 1600 Rhode Island Avenue, N. W. Washington, D. C. You can't go wrong on this one!

How To Blow Up A Gun

THE other day I received a letter from a fellow who should know better. He said he had successfully removed an obstruction (a well-stuck wad of waste that was being used for cleaning the bore. Tsk! Tsk! Why not use commercially sold patching material such as cotton canton flannel. It's cheap and saves a lot of headaches) by shooting it out. Said obstruction was stuck in the barrel of a Colt Bisley Model Revolver in .32-20 caliber. It was successfully removed allright. The only trouble was that the barrel of this fine handgun had taken on the appearance of a small snake that had swallowed a nest egg—and where could he get a new barrel?

New barrels are easy to buy. He's lucky he isn't shopping around for new hands, or maybe a new head. Not a bad idea, at that—about the new head I mean!

Canned Rifles

DID you ever have a service rifle or handgun tossed in your lap with some tough sounding character advising you to "clean it up?"

If you have served a hitch in the Army, Navy or National Guard, you no doubt have

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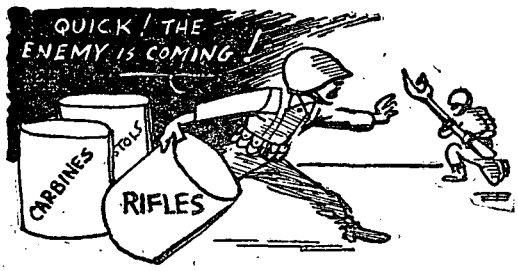
had a lot of unwanted experience with cosmoline, that sticky and pestiferous, but thoroughly efficient rust inhibiting grease that is used so unsparingly on service small arms.

My first experience with that viscous demon was in the Oklahoma National Guard, and I'm sure that I never did get that Springfield rifle completely clean!

But time marches on, and it looks as though cosmoline is being left behind, for up at Springfield Armory the Ordnance boys are canning small arms, just like beans, but without the tomato sauce.

Yep, that's right! Dehydrated rifles and carbines are being canned at the rate of 3000 a day, ten to the can. And the same technique will be used for storing handguns, sub-machine guns and Browning automatic rifles.



The canning process is quite simple. The pieces are cooked in ovens until most of the moisture content is removed from the walnut stocks.

A conveyor carries the rifles and carbines through a cleaning bath of naphtha, and a very light rust preventive. Next to the drying oven where racks hold the pieces inside the cans.

Packed with the arms is enough silica gel to absorb the small amount of moisture that may be in the air that is in the can when it is sealed by welding.

Small arms packed in this manner will remain in perfect condition at least for half a century and upon removal from the cans by the use of an oversize can opener, are ready for instant use.

Here's A Piperoo!

ALL OF a sudden, in July, express offices in El Paso and other Mexican border cities, started refusing to deliver small arms of any kind to consigners in that area, "on orders from the War Department." Such orders could not be discovered anywhere in Washington, but after three weeks of investigation by the National Rifle Association in the State Department, War Department and the Railway Express Offices from El Paso to New York, an order signed 30 years ago during World War I was uncovered. A clerk had redistributed this old order to Mexican Border offices! Needless to say (thanks to the N. R. A.) all shipments are now moving normally!

Major N. H. Roberts

NED ROBERTS has passed on to what we hope is even happier hunting grounds. The greatly respected author, writer, experimenter, and gun enthusiast died quietly at his home in Goffstown, New Hampshire, on July 20. Born on the ancestral farm in Goffstown, October 21, 1866, he was almost 82 years old.

The Major owned his first gun, a muzzle-loading percussion lock rifle at the age of nine and was an ardent shooter all of his life.

Roberts was an intimate of Harry Pope, A. O. Niedner, C. W. Rowland, Dr. F. W. Mann and other of the old timers who in no small part are responsible for the development of super accurate arms in the United States.

The .257 Roberts cartridge, which enjoys great popularity among shooters who demand and value arms of tack driving accuracy, is so named in appreciation of the invaluable efforts of Major Roberts in its development.

Although Roberts was keenly aware of the most modern ballistic improvements his real love was for the muzzle loaders of the past. His grand book, THE MUZZLE LOADING CAP LOCK RIFLE (a copy autographed in the Major's fine Spencerian handwriting is one of my prized possessions) will long remain a monument to his memory.

Major Roberts is survived by his wife Ethel. They had celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary.

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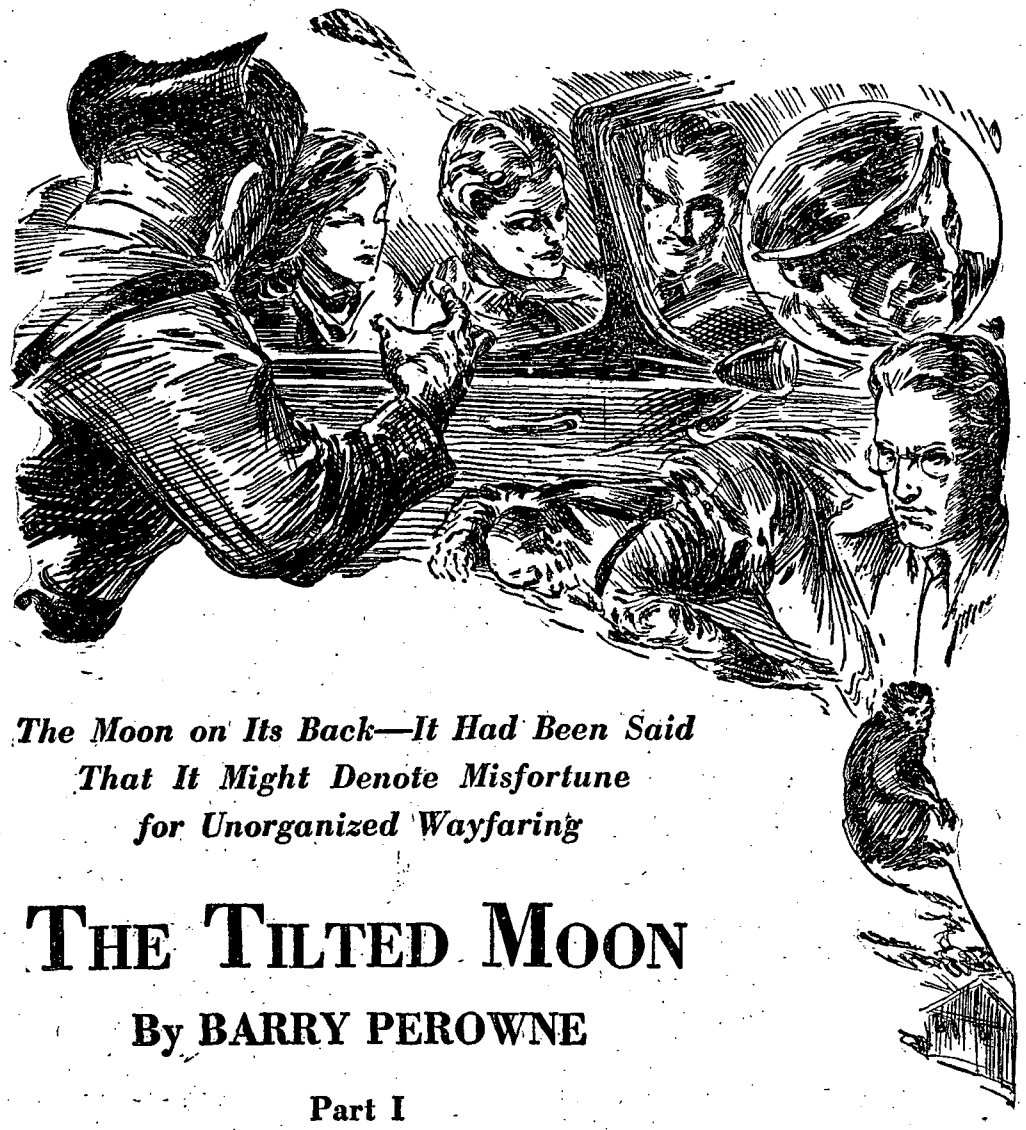

The Moon on Its Back—It Had Been Said That It Might Denote Misfortune for Unorganized Wayfaring

THE TILTED MOON

By BARRY PEROWNE

Part I

I

WITH a glitter and seethe, the long Atlantic rollers hounded each other in to burst in foam on the firm, wide sands of Cadiz beach. Against that background of dazzling whitecaps and blue sky, a diving-tower rose high above the date-palms which surrounded a hotel swimming-pool.

Bronzed men and girls, climbing the ladders, poised momentarily on the spring-boards, then flashed down in swallow dives and somersaults through the crystalline morning light.

Their voices and laughter came happily to Lesley Jerram across the road.

She sat at a small table on the terrace of a great, white, gaunt hotel. She was twenty-three, and but that her eyes, concealed now by sunglasses, were blue, she looked Spanish. She was tanned and slender; a *mantilla* would not have been unbecoming.

A leathery little waiter in a white jacket brought the breakfast things.

Lesley asked, "How long is this strike likely to last, Pepe?"

The waiter gave the table a flick with his napkin. The gesture was mere force of habit. He was used to continual dust, but there was no dust today. Southward to Al-

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geciras, eastward to Malaga, north to Seville, the long roads of Andalusia lay deserted and glaring under the sun. No wheels rolled.

"Who knows?" said Pepe. "Transport strikes are unpredictable." He stepped back from the table, his tin tray dangling.

Lesley stirred lumpy, hot chocolate in a small, earthenware bowl. With her left hand, she flicked a fan idly open and shut. The fan had been a gift from the first officer of the cargo ship, *Olalla,* which the day before had set her ashore here at Cadiz. She had been the only passenger. Her immediate destination was Gibraltar, but, faced with weeks of waiting for an air or liner booking, she had taken passage in the *Olalla,* which called at Cadiz, and she had planned to go on to Gibraltar by bus. She had reckoned without the transport strike.

She sipped her chocolate thoughtfully,

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doing sums in her head; she couldn't afford to squander money at this hotel for long.

Absently, she flicked the fan open and shut. It was a parchment fan, vividly painted with vignettes of a matador executing what she recognized, from long study of her father's library on bullfighting, as the *paseo de la muerte.* Her father had been a lover of Spain, had lived there for many years, and had left only because the civil war there had forced him to do so.

The house he had owned, loved, and quitted with reluctance, had now under his will become her property. Stephen Jerram had been a none too successful playwright; the house and its furniture was all he had had to leave, and Lesley, when she had been to Gilbraltar to consult her father's lawyer about it, planned to go and see for herself what survived of the property after all these years.

She was only recently out of the Navy, the trip was an experience, and she sought experience. Already, brief as was the time she had been in Spain, she had learned that it was a land of sharp, and startling contrasts.

She finished her chocolate and tried a little practice with her fan. It would be fun to master the art of handling a fan with Spanish insouciance.

She tried bringing it gracefully to her cheek, glancing up over it provocatively, but had the feeling that sunglasses cramped her style. Taking off the glasses, she was about to rehearse the piece of business again when she heard footsteps approaching from behind across the flagstoned terrace.

She hated to be caught acting. Hastily, she began to fan herself with the straightforward vigor of just plain feeling the heat.

It was the waiter again. *"Señorita—"*

"What is it?" Lesley asked. Her Spanish was fluent, an attribute she owed to her fathers' enthusiasm.

"This gentleman," said the waiter.

Lesley looked around. Standing beside the waiter was a man of about thirty with a mahogany-dark, keen face, brown eyes, a close-clipped, black mustache. He wore a white shirt open at the neck, gray flannels, dusty brogues. A light tweed jacket slung over one tanned, powerful-looking arm, he was filling a pipe from a worn pouch.

The waiter made introductory passes with his hands. "This gentleman is driving to Gibraltar. I have mentioned to him that—"

"All right, Pepe," the stranger said, and smiled at Lesley. "My name's Jack Moresby. I hear you want a lift to Gibraltar?"

"Oh, please," Lesley said, with eagerness. "Is there a chance?"

"Delighted," said Moresby, "if you don't mind help changing tires every couple of hours or so. The car got me here from Gibraltar and it'll probably get us back all right. If you care to risk it—"

"I'd try it on a bicycle," said Lesley; "only, I haven't got a bicycle."

Moresby glanced at the watch on his wrist. "I was just off. I want to get through today, if I can, and one has to allow for stoppages to pick up pieces of the engine. How soon can you be ready?"

"Five minutes," said Lesley, jumping up.

The car was standing at the wrought-iron gates when presently, with Pepe carrying her two suitcases, she walked down the steps from the terrace. The car was an ancient, open four-seater. Its dark red paint was weatherworn, its tires were smooth, its windshield was cracked, and horsehair bulged in handfuls out of the upholstery. Pepe dumped the suitcases on the back seat, with two spare tins of petrol, and Lesley got in beside Moresby.

"You see what you're trusting yourself to?" he said.

"It's as beautiful to me," said Lesley, "as the pumkin coach to Cinderella."

"Nothing like a strike to deflate our notions," Moresby grinned, and pressed the self-starter.

The old car shook as with palsy, and with a grinding noise and a stench they started, leaving Pepe waving from the pavement, and the bronzed young men and girls looking down on them from the diving-tower against the blue sky and the rollers seething white to the far horizon.

THE road was significantly free of traffic. It was hot and growing hotter. Men drowsed at *café* tables in the shade of bleached awnings. Bare tenement buildings towered above vacant lots of dune sand.

Lesley hadn't been in Spain since childhood. Her memories of it were vague. Fanning herself, she looked about with interest and excitement as the old car clattered along.

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"You live in Gibraltar?" Moresby asked her.

"Oh, no." She told him how and why she had taken passage in the *Olalla.* "How about you?" she asked.

"My dwelling-place is movable," he told her. "It's a yacht. Three of us are pirating around in her. She's at Gibraltar at the moment. We're doing some repairs and—looking for a job for her to do."

"What kind of a job?" asked Lesley, intrigued.

"What kind have you?" said Moresby. "We're open for anything." He grinned, pipe clamped between his strong teeth. "'Fact is, we're three ex-soldiers with an itch in the foot. We lumped our assets, bought the yacht, and put her in shape ourselves. We're heading in the general direction of Australia."

"An ambitious voyage!"

"Australia's kind of a long-term aspiration," said Moresby. "We aren't dogmatic about our destination. We take things as they come. That's why we registered the yacht as the *So Far.* The main thing is, she's got to pay her way—a bit of cargo here, a paying guest there. We'll take her anywhere there's a job for her to do."

"Three gentlemen," said Lesley lightly, "in search of a fortune?"

"In a nutshell," said Moresby. "I've just been up here to Cadiz about a job for the *So Far.* I hired this old rattletrap of a car from a friend in Gibraltar; it's licensed for both sides of the frontier."

Lesley wondered if he had landed the job he had gone after, and if so, what kind of a job it was. Glancing sidelong at him, she judged that he was definitely a hardbitten, ex-military type. There was a taut line to his jaw, and in the brown skin of his cheek was a small, white, horseshoe-shaped scar. She had the exhilarating feeling that he wasn't a man likely to be deterred from undertaking any job that looked profitable.

With Cadiz now far behind, they had the road still to themselves. It stretched ahead in hot shining vacancy, lined with silvery, peeling eucalyptus trees.

"San Fernando ahead," said Moresby.

Soon they ran into a long, straggling street of tall, balconied houses. The street, unexpectedly, was crowded with blue-shirted, dark-faced, sullen men. Placards nailed on poles stuck up here and there above a sea of heads. Mounted civil guards, looming like giants, thrust their horses through the throngs, keeping them milling. The voice of the crowd was a continuous, threatening rumble, which swelled suddenly to a roar of hostility as the car appeared.

"Sit tight," said Moresby. "They probably take me for a scab hackman. This can be awkward."

He changed down to second gear, then to low.

THE abruptness with which the crowd surged around the car, the din and confusion on every side, were the more shocking for contrast with the loneliness of the road they had been travelling. Unconsciously, Lesley was using her fan faster and faster as the car slowed to a crawl and the crowd grew more dense, the thunder of voices more vindictive.

Moresby's teeth were gripped tight on his pipe. He said sidelong, to Lesley, "We're all right as long as we can keep moving."

But the crowd ahead was showing less and less inclination to open for them. Suddenly one of the men running alongside leaped on to the running-board on Lesley's side. He bawled raucously, shaking a huge fist. One of the civil guards burst his horse through the crowd, stooped from the saddle, clutched the demonstrator by the back of his leather belt. He was hurled back into the crowd, which swayed in recoil.

His great black animal cantering alongside, the civil guard breathed a fierce blast of garlic past Lesley as he yelled at Jack Moresby.

Moresby waved his passport. "Foreigners!"

The civil guard with drawn truncheon waved him to keep moving, and sent his horse plunging ahead into the crowd. Moresby changed up into second; the old car quickened, rattling.

Bellowing toward them came a big, open truck. It stopped with a screech of brakes. Conscripts in bleached, shabby khaki and tasselled forage caps poured out over the sides. Unslinging their rifles, they deployed across the road and started forward in line, at the double, rounding up the more ambitious of the demonstrators, forcing them back into the main body of the crowd.

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The civil guard wheeled his horse, signalling Moresby to stop.

"*Documetntos,*" he demanded.

Sitting his lathered, fidgeting horse, he examined quickly their passports and visas, then flung them back at Moresby.

"Get out of town," he shouted.

Jerking his horse round, he cantered back toward the tumult.

Moresby dropped a hand to the gear-lever. The old car rolled forward again. Simultaneously, from the tree-shadowed doorway of a house on the right of the road, darted a slim figure in black.

The girl ran desperately beside the car. She wrenched open the door, leaped into the rear, and, crouching low there, begged, "Don't stop! Keep moving, *señor*! *Por Dios*, keep moving!"

Jack Moresby trod on the accelerator.

II

HE KEPT the ancient car going at its top speed, rattling along dementedly, while his brown, hard eyes darted glances into the rusty-framed, oblong mirror on the windscreen.

Lesley leaned over a little to take a look in the mirror herself. The crowds, the banners, the mounted men, all were steadily diminishing in size, receding.

Moresby grinned, pipe between his teeth. "Anyone spot her?" he said.

"I don't think so," said Lesley, and leaned back in her seat, fanning herself with little or no regard for the niceties of fan-handling.

Moresby glanced again into the mirror. He said to Lesley, "Tell her the coast's clear."

Lesley leaned over the back of the seat to convey the message to the other girl, who was sitting in a cramped position on the floorboards.

The girl pulled the two petrol tins from the seat, took their place on the horsehair-leaking upholstery.

"The man pack," she said. "Animals! Wolves! Lucky you came along—"

She was slim and tall, older than Lesley had thought at first glance. She was probably about thirty, with a smooth, ivory skin and dark, very Spanish eyes. There was a certain look of experience about her, a hardness and wilfulness about her mouth. She wore a light-weight black raglan coat over a simple black frock with a white leather belt. In her ears were white coral clips, and she nursed in her lap a small overnight grip with a zip fastener.

Leaning forward, she said to Lesley, "Where are you going?"

"To Gibraltar."

"Good. It's time I had a bit of luck. You shall take me with you as far as Tarifa."

It was a statement rather than a request, and it was a peremptory statement, at that. The matter disposed of, the Spanish girl zipped open her grip, took out compact and lipstick, began to repair the ravages of flight.

Lesley glanced at Moresby. "She wants us to take her to Tarifa."

The Spanish girl, making up her lips, glanced over the compact-mirror. "I will pay you, naturally," she said.

"She says she'll pay you," said Lesley, "naturally."

"She does, does she?" said Moresby, his eyes on the road. "Ask her who she is."

The Spanish girl gestured impatiently with her lipstick. "My name's Elena Lorca."

Lesley saw that Moresby was watching the newcomer in the driving-mirror. He raised his voice to ask, "Who are you bolting from? What have you been up to?"

Elena Lorca said regally, "It is of no concern to you. It is a matter purely private."

Moresby glanced sidelong at Lesley. He shrugged. The car rattled on.

Lesley fanned herself, now and then glancing speculatively through her sunglasses at the Spanish girl's reflection in the mirror.

It was now past noon. The sun made the metal of the car burn to the touch. The coast had fallen far behind. The road continued empty of life. The eucalyptus trees had ceased. Here and there were groves of stately walnuts, their leaves glossy green in the dazzle. Each side of the road, fields of grain sloped away upward, bleached and brittle. Beyond the fields rose buff-colored hills, seamed and ridged against the heat-pale sky. Far off on the slopes stood occasional *haciendas* with slim, dark cypresses rising above the white walls that enclosed them.

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Lesley patted a yawn with her fan.

"Sleepy?" asked Moresby.

"It's the heat," she apologized.

"Better to make ground while the old crate's amenable," he said. "Still, we'll start watching out for somewhere to eat."

There was nowhere in the next village, Casas Amarillas, no inn or eating-house. A few miles on, as the car swung round a bend, the solitary figure of a man appeared, plodding along ahead in the middle of the road, mopping the back of his neck with a vivid red handkerchief as he walked. Hearing the car, he looked round, then began urgently to wave the red handkerchief.

"Can't refuse the poor devil a lift," said Moresby, "day like this."

Lesley felt a touch on her arm. Elena Lorca's hands were on the back of the front seat. She was leaning forward, gazing intently ahead through the cracked windshield.

"He's a *guardia,*" she said sharply. "Don't stop!"

She was too late. The car was already pulling up.

The man with the red handkerchief walked round on Moresby's side. "Who are you?" he demanded. "Where are you making for?"

He was a big man with a fat, swarthy face and a two-day bristle of beard. He was, as Elena had said, a civil guard; and, to judge by his epaulettes, an officer. His tunic was unhooked at his bull neck. His shoulder-straps and pouches of yellow leather, his belt and heavy pistol-holsters, he had taken off and carried slung over his left shoulder. There was a criss-cross scar on his shaven, tanned head.

"We're foreigners," Moresby said—"making for Gibraltar."

"Good enough," said the civil guard, and tumbled his equipment into the back of the car. He wiped the gloss of sweat from his face, jammed on his helmet. His little black shrewd eyes twinkled appraisingly over the travellers. "You will permit me," he stated, "to impose my gross bulk upon you as far as Dos Caminos. I am Lieutenant Carvello—at your disposition."

He bowed slightly, raising a hand to his helmet in salute. Without waiting for an invitation, he opened the rear door, heaved Lesley's suitcases to the floor, and, making the old car groan and tilt, climbed in beside Elena.

"All right?" he asked her. "I do not squash you?"

The Spanish girl shook her head coldly, drawing further over on her side of the seat. Carvello flourished his red handkerchief jovially.

"Forward to Dos Caminos," he said.

There was a faint grin on Moresby's lips as he started the car moving again. "I like the way these people requisition their seats," he muttered to Lesley.

"An old Spanish custom," she said. "How far's Dos Caminos?"

"Forty miles or so. Why?"

"I don't think Elena fancies a civil guard as her companion."

"She should have been quicker with her warning," said Moresby. "I thought it was the strikers she was on the run from, not the cops."

LESLEY, in the mirror, was watching the couple in the back. Carvello was conducting mopping-up operations with the gaudy handkerchief. As he heaved himself around, taking up most of the seat, he discoursed cordially, interspersing his remarks with blowings of relief and grunts of gratification.

"Aaah! It makes heat, my friends, no? These dogs of strikers! Not a car on the roads, not a train on the lines. Pheeew! Imagine—" he was addressing himself chiefly to Elena—"imagine, I am ordered by my enlightened superiors to report forthwith to Dos Caminos. In the midst of a transport strike! And I with one horse and that lame! Such is the service for you!"

Disgusted at the afflictions of a law-enforcer, he wrung out his handkerchief, settled himself comfortably, and proceeded to bestow upon the other three the boon of his interest.

"And you, *señorita,*" he said benignly, to Elena, "where do you come from?"

In the windshield-mirror, Lesley saw that the Spanish girl, withdrawn well into her own corner of the seat, kept her face averted from the lieutenant. In the pale, proud line of her profile, in the compression of her lips, there was suspense. Lesley saw it. She took it upon herself to divert Carvello's attention. She turned in her seat.

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"We've just come from Cadiz," she said, smiling.

"Ah, from Cadiz?" Carvello was rolling a cigarette with stubby fingers. "See any trouble, anything of these strikers, on the road?"

"Nothing to speak of," Lesley said.

IT WAS instinctively that she prevaricated, instinctively that she took the part of this Spanish girl who, for whatever reason, was in evident trouble with the law.

Carvello looked at her speculatively. "You speak pretty good Spanish. You're a native of Gibraltar?"

"No," said Lesley. "Only, I was in Spain as a child."

"What part?"

"In the Balearics."

"Mallorca, eh?"

"In Ramiros."

"Ah, the little island of Ramiros! Very beautiful, I hear."

"I hardly remember it," said Lesley.

She turned back firmly in her seat, glancing again at Elena's reflection in the mirror. The Spanish girl had slightly turned her head. She was gazing at Lesley with excitement and curiosity. Their eyes met, in the mirror. Instantly, Elena looked out again over the slopes of oats and barley, and Lesley could see only that arrogant, pale profile.

Carvello lighted his cigarette, cupping in hairy hands a tiny wax match that burned invisibily in the white shine of the sun.

"And you," he said to Elena— "you speak Spanish, also?"

She nodded curtly, not looking at him.

Lesley, fanning herself with an anxious rapidity of which she was unaware, by slight movements of her head could focus in the rusty-framed mirror first one, then the other, of the couple in the rear seat.

Elena, apparently absorbed in the scenery sliding by, was gnawing her lip. She looked as though she were in a shaking rage. Carvello sprawled at ease, his right arm extended along the back of the seat behind Elena. Cigarette drooping in his mouth, he studied her with narrowed eyes. And Elena was Spanish of the Spanish. Carvello was thinking as much. Lesley could see it in his broad, thick-lipped face, could see the calculation in his expression.

"You going to Gibraltor, too?" he said.

Elena nodded mutely.

"From Cadiz, also?" he persisted.

"*Si, si!*" Her tone was impatient. Still she kept her face averted from him.

Lesley, to distract him, turned round and asked, "How would you have got to Dos Caminos if you hadn't met us?"

"I'd have found a way," said Carvello carelessly.

He kept his eyes on Elena. There was nothing Lesley could do but watch them apprehensively in the mirror.

Carvello gave three quick puffs to the stub of his cigarette. Before Lesley, watching, divined his intention, he pressed the glowing end deliberately against the back of Elena's slim hand, lightly holding her veil.

Elena cried out, turned sharply, jerked her hand away.

Carvello boomed, in histrionic consternation, "A thousand pardons! So clumsy—"

His eyes were avid on her. For a second, they confronted each other. A slow grin of recognition, of triumph, stretched Carvello's thick lips. The girl jerked round, turning a shoulder to him.

At that moment, Moresby swung the car into the roadside, pulled the handbrake, switched off the motor.

"Here we are," he said cheerfully. "Lunch!"

III

THE place was miles from anywhere. It was a wayside wineshop. Handpainted on a board was the legend: *Venta de Pacheco*. There was no village in sight. The wineshop stood alone amid interminable undulations of grain.

Jack Moresby, stepping out of the car, stamped the stiffness from his legs. He stretched, yawned, grinned at Lesley, and said, "Something with ice in it? If there *is* any ice—"

She looked at him sharply, trying to judge how far he was aware of what had been happening in the back seat. His hard face told her nothing.

The car complained in all its springs as Carvello levered his bulk to the ground. In great spirits, he clapped his big hands together with a sound like a rifle report.

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He bellowed at the shop, "Come out here!" and beamed round on his companions. "My party," he said. "You're my guests. A good, thick omelette, eh? And an *arroz* with a couple of these fowls in it? *Bueno!*"

The fowls, ruffling their feathers against the fleas which visibly bespeckled them, were pecking about among the chairs and tables in the tawny side of a kind of reed-thatched pergola. Two venerable gentlemen in alpaca jackets, with faces wrinkled like walnuts, roused themselves from a trance over dominoes at one of the tables, and blinked astonishment at an incursion of newcomers.

From the wineshop came dawdling a small man in a blue cotton suit and a gnawed straw hat. He was promptly galvanized from his scratchings and yawnings by the assertive instructions of Lieutenant Carvello.

"Si, si teniente!" appeased the small man, who was presumably Pacheco. *"Pronto, pronto!"*

Seizing a large axe from a chopping-block under the pergola, he rushed among the fowls.

"Death in the afternoon," observed Moresby, as two decapitated squawks initiated the preparation of lunch.

Within the building arose the tumult of women. Feathers floated out of the open door, saucepans clashed, charcoal crackled. Pacheco reappeared with a tray bearing bottles of *manzanilla,* saucers of black olives, anchovies, potato crisps, toothpicks. He dragged two tables together, flapped a clean, checked cloth over them.

A crone with a nose that met her chin, garrulously conducted Lesley and Elena through to the back of the house.

Here, in a cobbled yard flecked hotly with the sun-glare through grapevines, she drew water for them from a well. Red and green peppers, spread out to dry, carpeted the cobbles. Garlicky aromas drifted out already from the kitchen nearby.

The crone left them. Elena walked to the end of the yard to look out over the slopes of whispering grain. Lesley, washing her hands in a bowl balanced on the well-head, glanced with troubled eyes at the Spanish girl. She prowled about the yard with a caged air. Returning to sit on the well-head, she zipped open her grip, took out a small cigarette-case. It was a platinum case, and a jewelled monogram caught the sun with a ruby blaze.

She lighted her cigarette, smoking with short, quick puffs, her expression brooding. Suddenly she held out her left hand, showing Lesley a burn-mark angrily red on the ivory skin.

"*His* work," she said, her eyes smouldering—"Carvello's"

"I know," Lesley said gently; "I saw."

"He wanted to get a good look at me," said Elena, "and he got it, damn him. He recognized me. He knows who I am. At the first *guardia* post we come to, he'll arrest me and hand me over."

Lesley dried her hands on the rough towel. "Why are they after you?"

"Because they don't like my politics," Elena said. She caught Lesley by the wrist. "You've got to help me."

"What can I do?"

"That man you're with—the driver. What is he to you?"

"I hardly know him," Lesley said. "He's just giving me a lift, as he is you."

Elena looked at her broodingly. "He seems hardbitten—and none too affluent. You think he'd stand back at the chance of making some money?"

Lesley thought of what Moresby had told her about himself. She said, a shade wrily, "I don't think so. Why?"

"I can't escape Carvello here," said Elena, "and he knows it. Where's there to run to but these wretched fields? Besides, he's recognized me, and he knows I'm trying to move south. He'd go on in the car to the nearest telephone and have the check points on the roads alerted. He'd make it impossible for me to get to Tarifa. But I've *got* to get there, and quickly. Somehow, we must ditch Carvello. You must help me, you and your friend the driver. I'll make it worth your while. I'm rich."

Again there was arrogance in her manner, a secure assumption that everybody's services were hers to command or purchase.

SHE went on quickly, "I want you to pass a message to the driver. It'll be easy, because you're sitting beside him. Tell him that, if he'll contrive to ditch Carvello somewhere along the road well away from

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a telephone, then take me on to Tarifa, I'll pay him three hundred pounds for the service. And I'll guarantee he gets out of Spain tonight the same way I shall get out—once I can reach Tarifa. Tell him all arrangements are made there, nothing can go wrong, and there's no danger once we reach Tarifa. You'll do that for me? Give him that message? It means my liberty—perhaps more—"

It was the appeal of the hunted for aid against the hunter. Whatever Elena Lorca might be, the studied cruelty of Carvello's act with the cigarette was vivid in Lesley's mind.

She said doubtfully, "I'll try to pass the message. It doesn't seem terribly likely to me, though," she added, "that he'll risk getting the whole Civil Guard on his track. For one thing, there's his car—"

"If he's compelled to jettison it at Tarifa," said Elena, "I'll reimburse him with far more than the value of that hearse. But I oughtn't," she went on, with a remorse, a gleam of humor, that was as attractive as her peremptory moments were the reverse —"I oughtn't to speak of it so. Aren't I only too happy to seek the chance of escape in it? See!" From her grip, she took a thick wad of English banknotes. She stuffed them into Lesley's handbag. "There's half the money, now, an earnest of good faith, in case he's—less proud than you! Give it to him when you pass the message. Then we can but wait and see. Wait and hope. Oh, yes, *hope*!"

She slipped a bracelet from her wrist, dipped her slim hands in the bowl of water. As she dried them on the towel, she turned her dark, enigmatic eyes on Lesley.

"You mentioned that you were in Mallorca as a child—Ramiros," she said. "Do you know anyone there, now?"

Lesley remembered the look of curiosity and excitement which Elena had turned upon her at the first mention of Ramiros.

Ramiros was Lesley's ultimate destination. At Ramiros stood the house which she had inherited, her father's house, the house where her father's brother, Edmund Jerram, now lived. He had lived there all through the war, and recently, through the lawyers in Gibraltar, he had tried to buy the house, but Lesley had refused to sell it until she had seen it.

She looked with blue, steady eyes at Elena Lorca.

"As a matter of fact," Lesley said, "I do know someone there—though I haven't seen him for many years."

"Would it," said Elena, "be Edmund Jerram?"

"It seems," said Lesley, her heart thumping, "to be a small world."

Elena nodded slowly. "What's he to you?"

"My uncle."

Elena gave her a long, strange look, and laughed softly.

"Why is it funny?" Lesley demanded.

"It's a curious coincidence, our meeting at all," Elena said. She made a gesture that embraced the sun-flecked, burning shadow of the yard, the silvery sheen of the grain slopes that girdled this wayside eating-house in a rustling isolation. "That we should meet in *these* circumstances," she said, "is more curious than you can possibly realize. What you are doing is— But no. Tell your uncle, tell Don Edmondo, of this meeting. Perhaps, then, he'll confide to you the cream of the jest."

From the kitchen doorway, the old crone called.

"Lunch," said Elena, and she gripped Lesley's wrist suddenly, tightly. "You won't fail me? Now that we have this bond?"

"I'll try to pass the message—and the money," Lesley promised.

To herself, she hedged that there was a good deal more she would like to know before she regarded a mutual knowledge of Edmund Jerram as a "bond."

Carvello greeted the girls' reappearance with shouts of cordiality. He lumbered to his feet to place chairs and pour wine for them. He was host at this repast. He permitted no one to be in error on the point, neither did he neglect to extend a hearty welcome to himself.

Elena kept her eyes on her plate, her delicate, black lace veil framing in graceful folds her ivory-white, contemptuous face. Lesley once saw Pacheco's glance flicker in sudden, startled speculation from the boisterous Carvello to the silent Spanish girl.

And all through the meal Carvello talked obliquely to Elena. He rallied her with remarks to which Lesley lacked the key for full understanding, but which she couldn't

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mistake for anything but mockery. He took pleasure in it. He baited Elena Lorca with as unbridled a delight as he brought to his guzzling.

The two venerable domino-fanciers, sharing with the party the baking shade of the reed-thatched, pergola, looked on with age-dazed incomprehension. Their tethered mule and donkey drooped their heads lower and lower, twitching tasselled ears against the flies.

Nothing passed along the road, from which the heat pulsed up with a taint of tar. About the feet of the lunchers pecked the carefree fowls, even as a steaming casserole was borne to the table by the old crone.

PACHECO followed, bearing a cobwebbed bottle, about which he murmured placatingly to Carvello. Carvello seized on it.

"*Diego*," he bawled, "this is more fitting!" He drove in the corkscrew himself, pulled the cork with a pop. With an exaggerated, ponderously ironical courtesy, he filled Elena's glass. "So! A fine wine for a fine lady!" He bowed low, sweeping his helmet from his bullet head. His small eyes glittered with malicious amusement. "Fit for a countess, eh? Your health, *señorita*!"

"Thank you, *teniente*," said Elena softly.

She rose in one smooth movement from her chair, lifted her glass, hurled it with all her strength straight at Carvello's face.

Wheeling, she darted out into the sunshine, making for the parked car.

Carvello dashed blood and wine from his face with the backs of his hands. He looked after Elena. His thick lips twisted. He lunged out from under the pergola into the white lightning of the sun, caught Elena by the elbows from behind as, with a foot on the running-board, she was sliding into the driver's seat.

Lesley seized Moresby's arm as he rose, napkin in hand.

Her heart beat violently. She spoke in breathless haste. "Three hundred pounds if you can ditch this man, well away from a phone, and get her to Tarifa!"

"*What's* this?"

Lesley thrust the wad of banknotes into his hand. "From Elena. On account. She's got to get to Tarifa. An escape out of Spain is all arranged there—for tonight. She swears you can get out with her. She'll reimburse you if you have to leave the car there."

He stared at her. "Who is she?"

Lesley shook her head. She glanced toward the car. Carvello had wrenched Elena round, thrust her into the rear seat. He was mopping his face with his red handkerchief, a hard grin on his face.

"You abuse my hospitality," he said. "A good meal ruined. I thought you had better manners. I imagined we could keep things on a higher plane of mutual understanding before our foreign friends."

He finished his equipment from the back of the car, pulled the yellow shoulder-straps into place, buckled the holstered belt.

"Things could have been handled," he went on, with his ponderous, malicious playfulness, "with decency, with tact. We could have stopped for a moment at the first *guardia* post, and all our foreign friends would have needed to know was that you had been—unavoidably detained. But no, for all her refinement and wealth, the Countess Elena de Vedra must needs behave before aliens like a harridan. You leave me no choice, Countess. You are under arrest for financing and distributing subversive Royalist literature. There are other things. You know about them. The charges fill a foolscap sheet, Countess. It was distributed, with photographs, all over Spain three days ago."

He drew a revolver from one of his holsters, clicked the weapon open, spun the cylinder. The caps of the bullet flashed hotly in the sun. He closed the revolver with a flick of the wrist.

"I have no handcuffs with me," he said. "I wasn't anticipating the pleasure of a meeting with the Countess de Vedra. Still, if there are any more demonstrations from you, I shall know how to deal with them. Meantime, I'll take charge of this."

He picked up her black bag from the road where she had dropped it.

"Now, we'll push on." He turned to Lesley and Moresby. "A thousand apologies that we cannot sit at leisure over our coffee and dessert. But you see," he said, with a flourish of his revolver, "my predicament, yes?"

"Quite," said Moresby.

He stepped out from under the pergola. His hair gleamed black under the sun. His

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right fist travelled in a short, sharp arc that twisted his whole body with the force behind it. It landed with an audible impact on Carvello's jaw, and the civil guard sat down heavily on the running-board. The car tilted. Carvello's right hand opened; the revolver slid from it. His chin dropped to his chest, his head bowed toward his knees.

Moresby snatched up Elena's grip, threw it into the back of the car.

Lesley, standing frozen, saw the sudden blaze of incredulity, hope, triumph in Elena's eyes. She spoke swiftly to Moresby, but he made no answer. He yanked Lesley's suitcases out of the back of the car, dumped them on the road, slid in behind the wheel.

Lesley awoke to what was happening. She took a quick step forward. Moresby glanced at her with a shake of the head.

"Stay put," he said. "You're in the clear."

The starter whirred. The car shook, slid forward.

"*Wait!*" Lesley cried.

Moresby glanced back over his shoulder. He lifted a hand. His grin flashed white.

"Be seeing you," he called—"we hope!"

IV

FROM the shimmering slopes in a fold of which the *Venta de Pecheco* lay ramshackle and isolated, there came, as the sound of the car faded, the stir and rustle of the brittle grain.

Lesley looked down at Carvello. He had struggled to a sitting posture, was clutching his bullet head in his hands.

She glanced at Pacheco, standing open-mouthed in the presence of catastrophe, and at the venerable domino-fanciers, blinking like daylight owls.

"Come and help him," said Lesley sharply.

Pacheco and the two old men raised Carvello, and in a kind of reeling scrum—for Carvello's knees had a tendancy to bow out sideways under him—moved in under the pergola. Lesley picked up Carvello's helmet and revolver, followed them.

Carvello sat on a chair working his jaw about his hands, a glassy look in his eyes.

Lesley turned to gaze again after the car. It was no more than a distant dazzle sliding up the slope of the road. It disappeared from view even as she watched.

She still felt stunned by the promptitude with which Moresby had acted on the message she had given him. Yet she realized that he could have chosen no better time or place.

This eating-house was miles from anywhere, no wires led into it to indicate the presence of a telephone. She realized, too, why he had left her behind. It was purely for her own sake. She could only hope it would turn out that way, but she wasn't at all sure that she wouldn't have been better off in that old car clattering along crazily toward Tarifa.

A roar of rage from Carvello brought her round sharply.

The lieutenant, awakened at last to comprehension of an outrage, was heaving himself up furiously from his chair. But as Lesley turned, his expression changed. He glared askance, stepping back so quickly that he knocked his chair over. Pacheco ducked convulsively.

Lesley became aware with a shock that she was still lightly brandishing Carvello's revolver.

She put it on the table with a grimace of distaste. "Take it," she said. "I don't want the thing."

Carvello seized it, holstered it, and, snatching his helmet from her, jammed it on his head. "Sit down," he bellowed. "Let me see your documents."

He seized them from her, skimmed through them, buttoned them into his tunic. "I'll keep these for the present."

"What does that signify?" said Lesley, with apprehension.

"It depends on yourself," said Carvello—"on your answers to my questions." He sat down opposite her at the table. "Pacheco, bring coffee." He hiccupped. He inflated his cheeks, thumped his chest with his knuckles, and added, "Also, bicarbonate. This business has unsettled me." He began to roll a cigarette. "Now, Miss Jerram, the truth. Who's that man?"

"I—I don't know," said Lesley.

"Come, you were travelling with him."

It was instinctively that Lesley ranged herself on the side of the fugitives; it was something she didn't stop to analyse.

She said, "I was stranded in Cadiz, because of the strike. I wanted to get to Gibraltar. The waiter at the hotel brought this

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man to me, and he offered me a lift. *I* don't know who he is."

"You sat beside him all morning and he didn't tell you his name?"

"No."

Carvello's shrewd little eyes probed her. "What was the name of this hotel in Cadiz where you met him?"

Lesley fanned herself a little more quickly. She wished she hadn't mentioned a hotel, but it was too late to back out.

"Hotel de la Playa," she said.

"Now, we're getting somewhere," said Carvello. "The Countess de Vedra was with him?"

"No, we picked her up along the road."

"Ah, an assignation!"

"It wasn't like that at all," Lesley said. "She asked for a lift—just thumbed us for it. It was at San Fernando. She was a complete stranger to him, I'm sure of it. She said her name was Elena Lorca."

Carvello sucked noisily at his coffee, "If she was a stranger to him, why did he butt in? What was it to him if she was arrested? What motive had he for his infernal meddling?"

"I can't imagine," said Lesley, fanning herself very quickly indeed. "Perhaps he's quixotic."

"He'll regret it," said Carvello. "He'll find it's no windmill he's taken on in me." He thought for a moment. "They're counting on getting across the frontier to Gibraltar, of course, before I can get word through to have them detained. *Muy bien,* we shall see. Pacheco!"

"Teniente?"

"Where is the nearest telephone?"

"It is a long way on from here—at Palocitos."

Carvello controlled his rage with an air ominously purposeful.

"So be it," he said, rising. "We have the time. We can get a call through to the frontier station at La Linea long before they can possibly get there. Moreover, there are check points of *rurales* on the road. At any one of them, the de Vedra woman may be recognized—though these *rurales* are a hairy-heeled lot. They have no such eyes in their heads as we of the Civil Guard, who are picked men, trained to observe details, to miss nothing, no matter how small." A thought struck him. He looked at Lesley sharply. "Did you notice the number of the car?"

"No," said Lesley truthfully, "did you?"

Corvello controlled with a superhuman effort a spasm of mortification. "Immaterial," he said, grinding his teeth, "immaterial." He rounded on Pacheco. "These beasts—this *burro,* this donkey—whose are they?"

"They belong to these *caballeros,"* said Pacheco, indicating the venerable domino-players—"Don Porfirio Diego and his brother, Don Famos Diego."

"Get the panniers off the beasts," said Carvello. "I will write a receipt for the animals and they can be collected from the Civil Guard post at Palocitos." Unbuttoning a pocket of his tunic, he produced a thick black notebook.

One of the aged brothers cupped a hand round his ear, leaning forward. "What does the officer say, Pacheco?"

"He's going to requisition your beasts, Don Porfirio," said Pacheco, with compunction.

"The *burro* for me," said Carvello, tearing a couple of pages from his notebook and sitting down to scribble, "and the ass for the lady."

Lesley started. "For me? Do you imagine I'm going to ride an ass for miles and miles?"

Carvello looked at her. "Take your choice," he said. "I'll arrest you now and you can walk to Palocitos at my stirrup-iron, or you can co-operate in my exigencies and ride the ass. Which is it to be?"

"The ass," said Lesley, with a sigh.

"Bastante!" said Carvello, and, distracted by indignant noises at his shoulder, turned to face a deputation of patriarchs—Don Porfirio and Don Famos, stirred to their depths.

Carvello dealt with them with less than the deference due to longevity and wisdom. And it was among few cries of well-wishing—in fact, it was in a stony silence, malignant with the unspoken accusation of "Horse-thieves!"—that there set out presently a cavalcade comprising a bulky, bad-tempered civil guard on a tall, raw-boned mule, and a girl in a blue frock with white buttons, a blue-and-white polka dot handkerchief tied over her hair, astride a shaggy donkey, her luggage behind her.

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THE donkey's busy jogging was not a gait to which Lesley got used to all at once. Its rhythm was not quickly discernible. The civil guard, looming huge against the bleached blue sky, lurched easily to the mule's gaunt striding.

As she accustomed herself to the motion of her own steed, the thought that she and Carvello, thus mounted, were in pursuit of the car—were, in fact, a punitive expedition—appealed so irresistibly to Lesley's sense of humor that she laughed aloud.

Carvello glared round and down at her.

"Sorry," said Lesley. "I was just thinking."

"We'll see how much you laugh in jail tonight," said Carvello sourly.

He was bluffing, Lesley thought. There was no charge he could bring against her. He didn't know that she had passed the message which had led to Moresby's precipitate intervention. He didn't know she had concealed her knowledge of Moresby's name. He didn't know she was concealing the further fact that the fugitives were making for Tarifa, not for Gibraltar at all. He hadn't got a thing on her, she assured herself sturdily; but she kept her fingers crossed.

The *Venta de Pachèco* vanished among the slopes of grain. Ahead the road rose in a long incline toward steep hills dotted with sparse stone-pines. Summits of naked rock rose jagged against the blue. The grain fields were left behind. The road snaked around gulfs and buttresses as it corkscrewed higher.

Nothing moved on those loops of road trembled over by the heat blur. Soon the sky, remote to the westward whence they had come, began to grow lambent and luminous with a presentiment of sunset.

Palocitos was already in shadow when finally mule and donkey came plodding wearily into the village. A huddle of ancient houses, it crouched at the base of a crag towering sheer and dark, crowned by the battlements of a crumbling castle.

From windows and doorways down here in the dusk, lights shone. Shadowy figures loitered on the steps around the village pump. They stared in silence, seemingly incurious, at the oddly assorted riders.

"Is there a civil guard here?" Carvello called.

No one answered him, and he swore between his teeth.

Up the street a little, a bead curtain was drawn aside. A man emerged, stooping, from the low doorway, and Lesley saw his helmet against the light as he straightened up.

Carvello saw it, too.

"We're here," he said. Halting the mule and donkey before the small house, he spoke to the man on the steps. "Lieutenant Carvello, trooper headed for Dos Caminos. I've a foreigner here, in custody. Is your telephone working?"

"*Si, si, teniente.* Come in."

Stiffly, Lesley dismounted. Wearily, in a small whitewashed room hung round with official notices and dazzlingly lighted by a naked electric bulb, she sank down on a wooden chair. Numbly, she untied her kerchief, gave a little shake to her hair, rippling blue-black from its center parting. She was deeply tanned from the long day in the sun. It made her eyes seem more than ever blue. She looked very young; and the eyes of the lean, tall trooper, flickering to her in curiosity, softened a little.

Lesley was beginning to feel in need of some softening somewhere, even if it was only to sit on. So she smiled tentatively at the trooper, offered him a cigarette. He accepted it with a deprecating lift of the shoulder, and, diplomatically, she offered a cigarette to Carvello, too. He took it with a grunt, mashed it in a thick hand, began to re-roll it in one of his own papers. Putting the resultant shapeless object between his lips, he slumped down in a chair at the bare pine table which served as a desk, pulled the telephone toward him.

HE REGISTERED long-distance calls to Algeciras, La Linea and Cadiz.

Working his jaw about with his fingers, he snarled at the trooper, "Have you a cell on the premises?"

The trooper nodded, with a sympathetic glance at Lesley.

"Whether she sleeps in the cell or in the inn across the road," said Carvello, "depends on the result of these calls—and on herself. Give her ink and paper." He looked at her. "You can write Spanish? Good. Then write out a formal statement of what you witnessed. If there's anything you haven't

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told me, I advise you to put it in. This is your last chance."

The trooper hitched a chair up to the table for her, gave her ink, paper and a pen with a crossed nib.

"Be sure," Carvello growled, "that you write in there plainly that you saw that man strike a civil guard officer unconscious in the act of making an arrest. He'll be sorry he ever saw Spain before I'm done with him."

Reluctantly, she began to write, while the trooper breathed garlic encouragingly over her shoulder.

The telephone rang. Carvello clutched it. "Civil Guard, Palocitos. La Linea? Give me the commandant of the *Aduana.*"

Lesley chewed the end of her pen, watching Carvello anxiously as he bawled and blew tobacco sparks into the telephone.

When he hung up, it was with a grin of fierce triumph.

"They've not yet," he exulted, "crossed the frontier to Gibraltar. They won't get through, now. They're too late. *That* bolthole's blocked."

Depressed, she resumed her writing. Again the telephone rang. This time it was Cadiz on the line.

"Get me the Hotel de la Playa," Carvello demanded. "Hotel de la Playa? Civil Guard, Palocitos. An English girl called Jerram, Lesley Jerram, left your hotel this morning in company with—Ah, you remember the incident? I want the name of the man she was with. Who? Spell it." His pencil scratched. "Moresby—John Moresby. Passport number? Good. Address to which proceeding? Yacht *So Far,* Gibraltar. Yacht, huh? How long did he stay in your hotel? H'm! Any idea of his business in Cadiz, his contacts? He did? It was yesterday evening he had these visitors? He talked to them up in his room? A private conference, eh? Did you recognized any of these men?" His pencil scratched rapidly. "Yes, yes, you've done well. Put me back to the exchange. *Cambio?* Give me civil guard headquarters, Cadiz."

THE long conversation which followed wasn't entirely clear to Lesley, but Carvello grew increasingly flushed and excited. When finally he hung up, it was to rub his hands together with relish.

"As I thought," he said. "This Moresby is either a crook or a British agent!"

"A British agent?" Lesley said faintly.

"That," said Carvello, "is my personal bet. He's mixed up with some shady people. When we catch him, as we shall now, he'll have more than an attack on a civil guard to answer for, more even than aiding the escape of a political fugitive. By the time we've sifted this man, he'll be a candidate for the penal settlement for lifers." Carvello gloated. "Finish writing that statement, then the trooper'll take you over to the inn and get you a room. Presently I shall give myself the pleasure of dining with you. And, trooper—"

"Teniente?"

"Get a room for me, too. And order dinner," said Carvello. "I've had nervous dyspepsia all afternoon, so make it something light—a vegetable soup, a dish of fried eggs, a few cutlets and *garbanzos,* and you can tell them to stew a kid with rice and peppers."

"Very good, *teniente.*"

The telephone rang. Waving them from him, Carvello snatched it up. "*Hola,* Algeciras?"

The trooper held aside the bead curtain. Lesley stepped out into the night. It had grown cooler. From somewhere came the sound of water running fleetly in irrigation channels. She looked up. The stars were bright. The black crag soared against the sky. Above the battlements of the ruined castle hung a new moon.

V

MORESBY pointed out the new moon to Elena de Vedra. "We have in my country," he told her, "a saying that when the new moon rises tilted on its back, it's a bad sign."

"And that," Elena said, looking at the silver gondola sailing among the stars, "is what you call 'tilted on its back'?"

"Yes."

"A fig for superstition," said Elena. "Haven't we had luck so far? Hasn't the car kept going? Haven't we passed every *rurale* check point without trouble, in spite of my false papers?"

Moresby bit on the stem of his cold pipe. In the starshine, the car was rattling along

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a road between high banks tufted with cactus, spiked and shadowy.

"Maybe the bad omen's for Lesley," he said. "I'm worried about her. Maybe I did the wrong thing in leaving her. I thought it was for the best. I anticipated more trouble along the road than we've had. I wonder what in blazes has happened to her?"

"They can do nothing to her," said Elena. "She will have more sense than to tell Carvello she passed my message to you. To him she will appear a victim of our escape rather than a confederate in it. I shouldn't worry."

"*You* certainly are not," said Moresby drily.

"Worry," said Countess Elena de Vedra, "anxiety—these are characteristics of the base-born. We're very close now," she said, and leaned forward to peer through the cracked windshield. "Yes, just ahead there—on the right. You see? That board nailed to the eucalyptus tree. Ahead lies Vejer. We don't enter it. We turn off the road where the board is."

The board was painted with letters slanting in different directions: *Cortija de la Concepcion, 4 km.* It showed up in the glow of the car's one ill-focussed headlight, and Moresby turned off the road on to a dust-deep, stony track. The car bumped and clattered.

"The radiator is boiling," said Elena.

"Just discovered it?" said Moresby, fighting the wheel as it bucked. "It's been boiling for the past twenty miles. It's probably nearly dry. How the old car's kept moving is a mystery to me."

"It will get us there now," said Elena. "Yes, there is the gateway, right across the track ahead. See, the arch with the bell in it—and they have left the gates open for us. Good."

A dog's eyes flared yellow in the headlight beam. The dog was a big, crossbred pointer. It stood under the arch, baying furiously at the car, and only sprang aside as Moresby drove, bumping, into a cobbled courtyard.

He switched off. The radiator crackled and hissed. The dog's nails scraped as it leaped up at the side of the battered old car.

"Down, Kiko," a voice said. Out of the shadows stepped a man's figure, tall and stooped. He carried a shotgun in the crook of his arm. "So you got through, Elena," he said.

She held out a hand to him joyously. "I am here, Fernando!"

"And your friend?"

"Mr. Moresby—Don Fernando Lopez," Elena said.

"*Me alegro,*" said the man with the shotgun. "Now, it is better to get the car under cover. Will you drive into the barn across the yard there, Señor Moresby? The doors are open, as you see."

Don Fernando was waiting for them in the starlight when they emerged from the barn. He closed the big doors.

"All is ready for tonight?" Elena asked eagerly.

"All is ready, Elena. You leave between one and two. I have been watching, and the beach should be free of *carabineros* at that hour."

They moved toward the house, long and low, glimmering white in the starshine. Dogs were barking within. Don Fernando opened a door. They entered a huge hall with a flagstoned floor strewn with rugs, a beamed ceiling. Candles in branched candelabra burned on a great refectory table set for a meal. Pointer dogs came to sniff the strangers, then sprawled again, flogging the floor with their tails. Don Fernando was a gray-haired man wearing riding-breeches, tweed hacking jacket, and a narrow black tie. His lean, well-bred face was darkly tanned, with a torpedo beard. He stood his gun in a corner, poured three glasses of wine.

"To your safe arrival, Elena," he said, "and to your safe departure."

They drank.

"Now," said Don Fernando, "you will wish to refresh yourselves." He crossed the room and pulled an old-fashioned bellcord. "Paco," said, to the manservant who entered, "take this gentleman to Don Felipe's room."

MORESBY followed the manservant, who wore a black alpaca suit and rope-soled shoes, up a broad staircase of carved oak. The hall was more like that of a manor than a farmhouse. The panelled walls bore coats-of-arms, stands of old weapons, trophies of the chase. Round three sides ran

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a galleried landing, and it was to a room off this that Moresby was shown.

"Towels and soap are here, *señor,*" Paco said. "Dinner in ten minutes."

He went out, leaving a candle. Moresby washed quickly at the old-fashioned washstand. Drying his face, he moved to the door, and as he went on towelling his hands, he listened. A murmur of voices reached him from the hall below. Very gently, he opened the door a crack. Now, Elena's voice became distinguishable to him.

"He wishes," she was saying, "to go to Gibraltar."

"It is awkward, Elena," said Don Fernando. "Felipe will not go to Gibraltar, that I know. It is his boat. He has the say. He's undertaken to carry you to Casablanca. It is risk enough that he has accepted. Nothing was said of going to Gibraltar."

"Dear old friend," said Elena, "there is no need. Tangier, across the straits, is international zone. If we land Moresby there, it is enough. He can cross to Gibraltar in the morning by the daily Bland Line boat. I have friends in the Tangier zone—the Larios family at Villa Sidi bel Sais. They have a private beach. Felipe can land Moresby there. Don't worry, I will arrange everything with Felipe when we go aboard."

"It is the going aboard that will be dangerous," said Don Fernando.

Moresby went on drying his hands slowly, listening.

"That's a moment," Elena said, "to worry about when we come to it." She laughed. "Fernando, you will never guess who made my escape possible!"

"This Moresby—"

"No, no! Somebody else. Moresby intervened because I was able to pass a message—and certain considerations—to him. It was a girl who passed the message. You could never guess her identity or her destination. It is the strangest irony. There is a mad humor in it."

"Tell me."

Moresby stooped closer to the crack of the door.

He heard Elena say, "Her name is Lesley Jerram. She is a niece of Edmund Jerram of Ramiros!"

"Jerram? Elena, this is inconceivable! Jerram, the—"

"The escape master, Fernando! The king of the loopholes! Amusing, isn't it? She knows nothing about him. She is completely naive. Yet she, of all people, made possible my escape! Oh, she is an amateur, I assure you. She would accept nothing for her service to me. How different from a professional merchant of escape, a wholesaler of it, like her uncle! Can you," said Elena, "imagine Don Edmondo of Ramiros refusing payment for his services?"

"He has amassed a fortune," said Don Fernando. "His customers always were squeezed by him to the last farthing of their capacity. Half the small craft in the western Mediterranean, every little contraband-running felucca and schooner, were at one time in his pay, working on his escape lines. But I should have thought the botton was out of that business by now."

"He's evidently," said Elena, "still at Ramiros. If his niece is going there, possibly it's because he is leaving—winding up that very profitable organization of his. Strange, my meeting his niece in such circumstances, wasn't it?" she laughed. "You know, there was a time—it was when he did that very useful, and highly paid, work for our cause—when he begged me to marry him."

"You wouldn't think of doing such a thing, Elena? The de Vedras are a family of lineage. This man Jerram is a soldier of fortune—and a traitor to his own country."

"Don't perturb yourself, Fernando," Elena said. "Now, I go to prepare for dinner. It's likely to be an exciting night."

MORESBY walked across his room to the chest-of-drawers where the candle stood. He put down the towel, picked up a comb, sleeked back his damp hair. His dark, keen face looked back at him, shadowy, from the mirror. His mouth was a hard line under his close-clipped mustache. His brown eyes were narrowed, speculative. Picking up the candlestick, he opened the door with a clatter, walked out on to the gallery landing.

Don Fernando, looking up from the hall below, pushed aside the dog that was nuzzling his knee.

"Ah, *señor!*" he said. "Come, let us drink an *aperitiva.*"

At a little before one, the three of them set out from the house. They moved in single file along a rough footpath over

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parched fields. The tilted moon voyaged among the stars. Presently, Moresby saw the silver flash of the sea ahead, and, very far off, the winkling light of Cape Spartel, on the dark African shore across the straits.

Don Fernando led the way along a sandy gully. Cactus clumps loomed black in the starlight. The air was full of the stir and scent of the sea. The beach opened before them. Moresby saw the white line of the small waves breaking. And, against that line, he saw a man's figure standing dark and still, peering seaward intently—a man with his hand on the barrel of a carbine, the butt grounded on the sand.

Don Fernando saw that silhouette simultaneously. He lifted a hand to stay the others, and sank like a shadow to the ground. Looking round as they followed his example, he whispered, *"Carabinero!"*

Lifting his head, Moresby peered each way along the beach. It appeared deserted, faintly glimmering in the starlight.

Moresby whispered, "He's alone. Leave him to me."

There was an exultant excitement in him as he wormed forward between the cactus clumps. Joy was in this movement, a keen edge to living, a zest and delight in conflict, that he had feared had passed for him forever with the passing of his army days.

The sentinel hadn't moved, was still peering seaward.

He was very close, now.

Moresby rose. Soundless on the soft sand, he ran forward, crouching. He kicked the sentry's carbine from his hand. His right arm whipped across the sentry's throat from behind, gripped his own left wrist as his left hand pressed down on the back of the sentry's head. Holding him silent in that throttling lock, he bore the man backward, heels dragging in the sand, till the flailing hands sank, the body grew lax. He loosed the man, then, letting him sink to the sand; and looking round, he called softly to the others.

Don Fernando looked at the still figure on the sand. "He's not—"

"No, no," Moresby said. "I just shut off his wind a little."

"Muy hombre," said Elena, and her face was ivory-pale, starlit, in the frame of her veil.

Don Fernando took a torch from his pocket. He flashed it seaward, thrice. Soon, as they waited, there came the quiet throbbing of a boat's motor. Moresby saw on the moon-glimmering water the outline of a small cabin cruiser, creeping inshore.

"It is Felipe," Elena whispered.

"Si," said Don Fernando. "You must wade out. You can dry yourselves aboard. Now, I must go, before this man—wakes."

Elena kissed the old grandee.

Moresby and Elena went down to the beach. The boat lay twenty yards out, its motor throbbing quietly, its screw churning the phosphorescence astern. Moresby felt Elena's hand in his. He smiled at her. The water was soft warm. It rose to their knees, to their waists, as hand in hand they waded out to the boat.

The tilted moon was gone from the sky long before Moresby was set ashore on a strip of beach just outside the suburbs of Tangier.

VI

LESLEY woke late in Palocitos, the village of the crag. She woke in a giant bed in a sunlit room with a bare board floor and walls equally bare. Her sleep had been long and dreamless, and it was to a tapping at the door that she wakened—a tapping far too discreet to suggest the forthright hand of Lieutenant Carvello.

She slipped out of bed, pulled on a wrap, opened the door a crack.

Outside was the hardbitten but susceptible trooper, helmet in hand.

"The *teniente's* gone," he told her. "I'm to take you to the office to sign your statement before a notary, then your passport will be returned.

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Her spirits soared. "You mean, I can go then?"

"*Si, si.*"

"But how?" she said, struck by a dismaying thought. "On the donkey?"

"That won't be necessary," grinned the trooper. "The strike's over. In an hour the bus will leave for La Linea. You'd better hurry."

"I will," said Lesley. "Oh! What about the—the Countess and Señor Moresby? Is there any news?"

"If I were you," said the trooper significantly, "I should forget them."

But when, in the bus, later, the woman beside her said suddenly "Tarifa," Lesley clicked shut her fan, looked quickly from the window. Cactus clumps lined the right of the road. The bus, a sweltering, solid-tired boneshaker, banged past a hand-printed sign nailed to a tree: *Cortija de la Concepcion, 4km.*

There came a right-angled turn in the road. Oblique in the angle stood an ancient Moorish arch, clustered about by mules and loiterers.

Lesley's informant clutched firmly by their legs a brace of rumpled hens from which came an occasional expiring croak.

"Outside the arch," said the woman, "is called Vejer. Within the arch, that is Tarifa."

Lesley thought of Elena de Vedra and Jack Moresby, and she turned her head to gaze at the old, walled town, at the parched fields away to the right, at the tilt and flash of the sea beyond.

Somnolently inscrutable, Tarifa receded into the hot afternoon. Lesley fanned herself thoughtfully.

The bus ground downward through woods of cork trees, their straight, red trunks neatly stripped of bark, and the wide bay of Algeciras opened ahead. She saw Gibraltar looming, at last, in the distance. It gave her a hollow feeling inside. It was all very well for that civil guard trooper to tell her to forget Elena and Moresby. Suppose they had been caught? She might be held up at the frontier, sent back to Cadiz or Seville for cross-examination on the statement she had made.

She watched the Rock rear higher, watched the glitter from the windows of houses crowding terrace above terrace on its westward slope, as the bus toiled along the road that followed the curve of the coast.

Presently the buildings of La Linea shut off her view.

IN A SUDDEN confusion of market-stalls, mules, carts, people, goats and turkeys, the bus groaned to a standstill before a gaunt, huge, yellow building marked *Frontera—Aduana de La Linea.* The arch which traversed the building was blocked by barbed wire barriers and patrolled by slouching *carabineros* and mounted civil guards.

Carrying her two neat suitcases, Lesley walked toward the barrier. She was tense; her heart thumped. It seemed to her that a stir of interest passed among the lounging sentries at her approach. One of them came forward, carbine held slanting across his chest.

"*Documentos,*" he demanded. He took one look at her passport, then turned and shouted, "This is her!"

Another sentry walked across to the barrier on the far side. Beyond the barrier, in the sunshine that poured down on the straight road across the neutral territory, stood a high-slung carriage.

The sentry spoke to someone under its canopy, and a man stepped out. He was young, lean, tall. He wore impeccable white flannels, a double-breasted blue coat with a carnation in the lapel, a white felt hat with the brim turned down all the way round. In one hand he carried a briefcase. The far barrier was drawn aside for him. He walked in under the arch to the barrier where Lesley waited in trepidation.

He raised his hat courteously. His hair was short, crisp, corn-colored. He had a brown, blunt face, and a pair of massively tortoise-shell-rimmed spectacles added to the severity of his expression. His eyes were as blue as her own.

"Miss Jerram?" he said gravely.

Lesley moistened her lips. "Yes."

"I," said their impressive newcomer, "am Simon Beaufoy, of Beaufoy, Beaufoy and Azzopardi, London and Gibraltar. We have corresponded, you recollect."

"Oh!" Lesley breathed, in relief. "You're my father's lawyer!" With a return of uneasiness, she added, "Is—is everything all right?"

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"I see no reason," said Simon Beaufoy, "why it shouldn't be. We didn't expect you until today, in view of the melancholy disorders across the frontier here. I've been meeting the buses—there are only three in the course of the day—in order to facilitate your passage through the *aduana.*"

"That's very good of you," said Lesley warmly.

"Not at all," said Simon Beaufoy. "Oh, there—*carabinero!*"

"Si, señor?"

THE legal gentleman indicated the bristling barbed wire barrier with a gesture of displeasure.

"Take all this away," said Simon Beaufoy.

The deed was done with as much celerity as if he had been a grandee of Spain.

"You seem to have them eating out of your hand," said Lesley, with admiration.

The carriage was bowling them along the road across the neutral territory, which stretched dune-like and sun-scorched to the sea on either side.

"It's just that they know me there," said Simon Beaufoy modestly. "Tell me, did you have a reasonable journey? My partner and myself were concerned about you when we heard of transport strikes—riots—"

His tone condemned disgraces perpetrated by malicious ruffians, scarcely to be distinguished from savages, along the path of a delicate woman. Lesley found herself using her fan, instinctively, with more sweeping strokes.

"It was rough in spots," she confessed.

"An adventurous project," said Simon Beaufoy, "coming by cargo ship!"

He smiled at her kindly, as one indulging the amusing escapade of a gently nurtured but headstrong girl.

He made everything smooth and easy. At the British gate, a word from him brought beaming smiles from the customs officer trim in khaki drill and pith helmet and from the bulky police sergeant sweating in blue serge. They looked at Lesley as much as to say, "If you're with Mr. Beaufoy, we know you're all right." They hardly bothered to examine her passport and suitcases.

"I've taken a room for you at the Peak Hotel," said Simon, as the carriage bowled on. "I wasn't quite sure how long you were planning to stay?"

"Oh, just long enough," Lesley said, "to get your advice about the house at Ramiros."

"Ah, yes—our advice." Mr. Beaufoy's tone was non-committal. "The expert on it is my partner, Mr. Azzopardi. He was a friend of your father's. It was he who negotiated the purchase when your father, having rented the house for some five years, finally bought it in 1934. But I suggest we go into conference about this at some other time—when you're rested after your journey." Changing the subject, he asked, "You know Gibraltar?"

"I've been ashore here once or twice when I was a kid, going out to Ramiros with my people," said Lesley; "but I hardly remember it at all."

The carriage pulled up presently before a white hotel. It overlooked the palms, magnolias and pepper trees, and the vivid, massed blossom, of the Alameda Gardens. The place was so large and expensive-looking that Lesley instantly decided that she couldn't afford to stay here long.

As Simon handed her down with grave courtesy from the carriage, she asked, "When can we have our business conference with Mr. Azzopardi?"

Simon looked at her with troubled eyes. "You're very anxious to go to Ramiros, aren't you?"

"Of course."

"Very well," he said. "Tomorrow, at eleven, at the office? I pointed it out to you—near the courthouse, you remember. And perhaps you'd have lunch with me afterwards?"

"Thank you."

"Till tomorrow, then."

Simon smiled, lifted his white felt hat, stepped back gracefully into the carriage.

LESLEY met his partner next morning. Mr. Peter Azzopardi was a small, wrinkled, nut-brown man with a bald, flat-topped head, a tuft of unnaturally jet-black beard, and little, black, vivacious eyes.

He rose, to greet her, from a desk at which he sat with his back to an open window. He wore a spotless white linen suit and a narrow black tie. The desk, the whole of the cramped little room, was stacked about with deed-boxes that looked the more battered, pink-taped dossiers that looked all the dustier, for contrast with the sunshine

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and brilliant blossom visible through the window.

He took Lesley's hand in a bony clasp.

"I knew your father, Stephen Jerram, very well," he told her. "He was, like myself a great lover of the *corridas,* the bullfights. We made many an expedition together to see the masters, in the old days. Finished, now—all finished. Degenerate. Hah, your fan!"

He seized it, clicked it open, examined the bullfight vignettes painted on the parchment.

"Spirited work," he enthused. "Manoleto in a characteristic *faena.* Gone, poor fellow—killed in the ring quite recently. The last of the masters." He stretched his long, legal upper lip, clean-shaven above his goatee. "You must treat that fan with deference, Lesley—if I may call you so? I remember you as a small girl falling asleep in this office when your father and I were talking bulls and should have been talking business. There's the very deed-box you were sitting on—that one marked 'Maria Gonzalez y Valera.' But you wouldn't remember that."

"Not very well, I'm afraid," said Lesley, looking at the historic relic, which from its shape appeared to have been sat on by other and heavier people since her day.

"Naturally, not to be expected," said Mr. Azzopardi, handing back her fan.

"No," said Lesley, "please keep it. I'd like you to have it. You can appreciate it much better than I can."

"That's most kind," said Mr. Azzopardi warmly. "I shall add it to my collection of bullfight mementos. Simon!"

"Sir?"

"When you take Lesley to lunch, you will escort her on my behalf to Osmanazar's to select a fan."

"A pleasure, Peter."

"Now, to business," said the old lawyer, resuming his chair at the desk. "I understand you're quite set on a personal visit to Ramiros, Lesley?"

"I promised father faithfully," she said, "that, provided there was any chance of getting there, I wouldn't sell the place sight unseen. He loved it, you know. He and my mother were happy there together. They hated having to leave. The place is full of furniture that they had a lot of fun collecting. He was very anxious that I shouldn't sell without seeing the place, if at all possible."

"I see," said Mr. Azzopardi. Absentmindedly, he offered her a box of black Trichinopoly cheroots. "No?" he said. "Oh, no, of course not." He ignited one himself, at the lighter Simon held for him, and peered at Lesley through puffs of smoke. "Do you remember the place at all?"

"Vaguely," she said. "But I was at school, and only went to Ramiros once, after I was eight."

"It's a beautiful place," said Mr. Azzopardi.

"Yet I have the feeling," Lesley said, "that you and your partner don't want me to go there, for some reasons."

"It's so far off the beaten track," said Simon—"in these days."

"But it's not as though I knew no one there," she argued. "My uncle, Edmund Jerram, is there."

"And how well," said Mr. Azzopardi sharply, "do you know Edmund Jerram?"

Lesley smiled. "You have me there," she said. "I hardly remember what he looks like, even. Still, he *is* my uncle."

"Have you written him," said Mr. Azzopardi, "about this proposed visit?"

"Yes," said Lesley. "I must admit that his reply wasn't overwhelmingly enthusiastic. He said Ramiros was an awkward place to reach. He offered to buy the house from me at a price *you* would agree was fair."

"I've a confirmation of the offer here," said Mr. Azzopardi. "All things considered, I advise you to accept it, Lesley."

"But why should I?" she exclaimed. "It's just what father asked me not to do—sell it blind. Besides, once I've seen it, I may not want to sell it at all."

"You wrote your uncle to that effect?" asked Mr. Azzopardi.

"More or less. I told him I'd come out and talk it over with him."

MR. AZZOPARDI rotated his goatee thoughtfully.

"A visit's probably all right," he said. "Probably quite in order. In fact, we probably have reason to feel obligated to your uncle. He and your father had different views about the civil war in Spain. Your

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uncle's sympathies were with the side that prevailed. I believe he was actively helpful to that side in certain matters. If he hadn't chosen to go and live in his brother's house, there's a possibility it might have been confiscated. That that hasn't happened is something we probably owe to Edmund Jerram. He is, as the saying goes, well in. That is why he, an Englishman, has been allowed to live there unmolested all through the war. But the question that somewhat troubles me, Lesley, is—what has he been doing there all these years?"

Uneasily, Lesley remembered Elena de Vedra's cryptic remark, at the *venta*, about the "cream of the jest." She said nothing.

"Not to put too fine a point upon it," said Mr. Azzopardi, "Edmund Jerram is something of a man of mystery—and as a lawyer, I look askance at men of mystery. We have to do business with him, yes. The house is yours, but he's the man in possession. My own inclination, however, is to advise you to accept his offer and—er—give him a wide berth."

Lesley tapped her sunglasses thoughtfully on the palm of her hand.

"It's difficult, isn't it?" she said. "If I sell, I shall be doing just what I promised father I wouldn't—selling blind. And for no reason except—forgive me, Mr. Azzopardi—just a vague distrust, after all. And I've come so far, now; I'm so close—"

The old lawyer rasped his beard.

From a drawer of his desk, he took a parchment, stiffly crinkling. He unfolded it. It was a plan, painted in pale water-colors. He rolled his cheroot from one side of his mouth to the other.

"Here," he said, "is Ramiros—a small island, as you see, very small. Here is your house. Your father bought the ground around it; here's the boundary, this dotted line. The rest of the island is given over to olive groves. They belong to the Mallorquin landowner from whom the house was bought, and are tended by one or two *peon* families, his tenants."

"It's not a desert island, anyway," said Lesley, smiling.

"True. Perhaps," said Mr. Azzopardi, "I'm just an old fogey. Still, there's just one thing that suggests my distrust of Edmund Jerram may not be altogether prejudice."

He leaned back in his chair. Outside the window at his back, butterflies danced in the sunshine over the brilliant flowers.

"Early in 1945," said the lawyer, "I had an inquiry about Edmund Jerram from a very unexpected quarter. It was a carefully camouflaged inquiry as to what I knew about him. I wasn't supposed to know where the inquiry originated, but it happened that I found out. It originated with the Secret Service."

Lesley sat up with a jerk.

"We mustn't attach too much importance to it," said Mr. Azzopardi. "It may have been a routine vetting of an Englishman living, in wartime, in a neutral country. On the other hand, there *may* have been some specific reason for that very tortuous, discreet inquiry."

"Mr. Azzopardi!"

"Yes?"

IN LESLEY'S mind was the memory of Jack Moresby's hardbitten face, his crisp, military mustache. She remembered, too, what Carvello had said about him: "He's either a crook or he's a British agent."

She leaned forward in sudden excitement.

"That inquiry," she said—"it didn't, by any conceivable chance, come from a man called Moresby?"

"Certainly not. Never heard the name."

"Oh," said Lesley, disappointed.

Mr. Azzopardi took a thin, gold watch from his breast pocket.

"Time you two were off to lunch," he said. "Think about this Ramiros visit carefully, Lesley. Talk it over with Simon here."

Simon opened the door for her. Young, tall, grave, elegant, he followed her down the stairs, out into the burning noon. Across Main Street, the flowers in the courthouse gardens were a welter of color.

Down the pathway there, in the shadow flicker of the palm fronds, was walking a strikingly rotund man in flannels and short-sleeved shirt of a dazzling white. His aldermanic circumference was swathed round with a pade-green sash and he wore a jade-green tie. He had a large, smooth, dark, pear-shaped face, buttressed by rubbery chins, and when he lifted his white linen hat to Beaufoy and Lesley, coming across the street to them, he disclosed a badger-gray head.

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"Congratulations," he said to Simon, "on your victory this morning."

"There was no real case against my client," said Simon austerely.

"Say, rather," purred the fat man, "that you young modern streamlined lawyers, fresh from London, are too clever for such as I—far too clever." He shook his head, beaming. "Well, well—see you in court this afternoon. Come, Horace!"

Respectfully shadowed by a slight, dusky young man in police uniform, who carried a portable typewriter in one hand, a bulging briefcase in the other, and a mass of dossiers under each arm, the rotund man billowed away bonelessly down Main Street.

"Another lawyer?" Lesley asked. "Somehow, I'd hate to have him against me."

"You're no mean judge," said Simon. "He's cunning and resourceful, and he loves a conviction. He—"

"What's the matter?" Lesley asked.

"I just thought of something. I knew I'd heard that name before." Simon stopped. "This Moresby you spoke of—is he connected in any way with a yacht called the *So Far*?"

Her heart began to thump. "Why do you ask?"

"Because that man we just spoke to," Simon said, "is Inspector Verano of the Gibraltar police, and he's very interested in a man called Moresby and a yacht called the *So Far*."

VII

THEY turned into a small, tree-shaded square filled with the hot glitter of parked cars. Horses, in the shafts of coaches, brooded into nosebags, while their drivers sprawled stunned under the tasselled canopies.

Lesley and Simon entered a restaurant dim and cool, quietly buzzing with voices. A waiter led them to a table in the window bay. Through the slats of the venetian blind, Lesley glimpsed the sea, brilliantly blue, freckled with white sails.

She looked at Simon.

"Why?" she said.

"Eh? Why what?"

"Why," said Lesley, "is Inspector Verano interested in Jack Moresby and the *So Far*?"

"Jack?" said Simon, with raised brows. "You know him as well as that?"

"Not very well, really," Lesley said. "But I'd like to know what you know."

Simon turned on Lesley his stern expression and contradictorily candid blue eyes.

"Peter Azzopardi and I," he said, "have our sources of information as to what goes on at police headquarters. I happen to know that Verano is extremely anxious to find some grounds for detaining the yacht *So Far* and the three men who run it."

"But why?"

"All I know," said Simon, "is this. They put in here to make repairs. Apparently something about the nature of the damage they'd sustained roused Verano's suspicions. They had, I gather, a plausible story, but he didn't believe it. He's got the idea they've been doing a bit of smuggling."

Lesley bit her lip. She judged that nothing was more likely than that the *So Far* had been doing some smuggling.

"He's suspicious about their activities in general," Simon went on. "He's trying to check back over their trail. Evidently he's got nothing on them yet, but he thinks he'd get something, given time. His fear is that their repairs'll be finished, and they'll sail out between his fingers, before he's built up some kind of case against them."

"What are they like?" Lesley asked. "The other two, I mean—not Moresby."

"One of them's a man called Jessop—Hal Jessop. The other one's a Frenchman called Bouchot. They're adventurers, the three of them, without any doubt. They've just got this yacht. They've no money, I hear, but they purport to be heading for Australia."

Simon ate an olive. He looked at her.

"I can't imagine how you can have met Moresby," he said. "But I'm struck by the thought that *you* might be able to provide Verano with exactly the kind of loose end he's seeking."

"I?" Lesley exclaimed.

Simon said quietly, "It's an offense for a man falsely to represent himself as employed by the clandestine services. When did Moresby tell you he was a secret service man?"

Lesley put down her knife and fork in a hurry. "He did no such thing!"

"Then why," said Simon, with an im-

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placability she hadn't suspected in him, "when Peter Azzopardi mentioned the secret service, did you instantly associate Moresby with it?"

Lesley drew a deep breath. "I'll give you," she said, "the whole picaresque history of my journey from Cadiz to Gibraltar."

She gave it to him.

It was a gift at which he looked considerably startled.

"You see?" she said. "It was Carvello's idea that he was possibly a British agent. And do you see, don't you," she begged, "why I feel rather anxious about what may have happened to him? After all, he was careful to keep me in the clear by abandoning me at Pacheco's."

"That," said Simon severely, "was the least that he could do, if he has even the first rudimentary instincts of a gentleman." He pondered. "Of course," he said, "if he's been caught by the Spanish, then there's nothing to worry about."

"But I'd hate to hear he'd been caught."

"I, on the other hand," said the callous lawyer, "should bear up capitally. It's pretty obvious he's a bad lot."

HE WENT on with his lunch for a while in frowning silence.

"You may," he said abruptly, "find yourself a witness against Moresby, whatever your own wishes. If he's got out of Spain, the Spanish authorities may lodge a formal protest with the Gibraltar police. If they do, a copy of your deposition will accompany the complaint. Verano would arrest him at once. You'd be subpoenaed."

He looked at her thoughtfully.

"Alternatively," he said, "if he's got out of Spain, but the authorities there have this illusion that he's a secret agent, then there'll be no formal complaint. He'll merely be marked down as a blown agent. His particulars and description will be circulated, and if ever he were caught on Spanish territory, he'd find himself in a bad way. Of course," he added, "if Verano got the faintest hint of Moresby's trouble in Spain, he'd pick away at it till he'd built up some sort of charge on which to detain both him and the yacht. Verano's patient and he's resourceful—and he wants Moresby and his friends."

He smiled at her troubled face.

"Still," he said, "I shouldn't worry. We can only wait on events. But your adventure surely shows, Lesley, that these—if I may say so—are hardly the times for unorganized wayfaring. Happy-go-lucky journeys by cargo ships and hitch-hikes are all too apt to end in concentration camps. I should give such people as these fellows on the *So Far* a width berth, if I were you."

As they were walking back up Main Street toward the courthouse, Simon cupped a hand suddenly under her arm and steered her in through the doorway of a large shop marked "Osmanazar's Bazaar."

"What's this?" said Lesley.

"Have you forgotten about your fan?" Simon asked.

After the glare of the street, the shop was a cave, latticed with sun and shadow, rich and mysterious. From rails overhead hung prayer-rugs, Spanish shawls. There were screens and coffee-tables of ivory, ebony and fretted sandalwood; trays of beaten brass, thimble-size cups, tall teapots with spouts in the likeness of writhen serpents. On the walls hung Cordoba hats, tarbushes, beaded camel harness; spurs, swords, scimitars, long-barreled Arab muskets chased with silver and inlaid with pearl.

There seemed to be no attendant in this treasure cave.

Looking around in wonder, Lesley said, "It hardly seems right to ask for a little thing like a fan!"

Simon chuckled as he beat on a gong which stood on the counter.

"Nothing's too small for Osmanazar to sell—or buy," he said. "And nothing's too big. He's the foxiest old rogue in the western Mediterranean—an unlicensed usurer, a fence, a dealer in contraband, anything you like."

In the shadows at the back of the shop, a door opened. It framed the sunshine and blazing flowers of a white courtyard, from which came a croon of doves, a silver piping of songbirds, a sudden burst of satanic laughter.

Startled, Lesley put a hand on Simon's arm. "What was that?"

"That," said the lawyer, tolerantly, "was what Australians call a 'laughing jackass.' Osmanazar's got an aviary out there."

Through the doorway stepped a fastidious crane, white-plumed against the pink of

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a geranium thicket heat-hazed in the courtyard. The bird checked, with one stilt leg daintily lifted, to cock a suspicious, golden eye at the intruders.

"Get along with you," said the man who was holding the door open for the bird to pass, and he came in, shooing the crane before him.

He was lean, tall, stoop-shouldered, with a broad, Moorish face netted with a complexity of fine wrinkles. His eyebrows were two tufts of white wool, and his eyes, surprisingly, were pale blue. His hair was white. He wore a black alpaca suit. On his shoulder sat a small, snuff-colored monkey, which, as Osmanazar came forward, sprang to the counter, ran along it with his tail coiled above his back, rang up "No Sale" on the cash register, and chittered madly to draw attention to the feat.

"Hassan," said Osmanazar affectionately, to the visitors, "is a show-off." Beaming, touching absently here a prayer-rug, there a flypaper, making them swing gently, he went on, "This is a great pleasure, lady, and Mr. Beaufoy. What can I show you?"

"Fans, Osmanazar," said Simon.

"Ah, fans! I have beautiful fans. One little minute. I will show you fans from the harems of shereefs and pashas."

Hassan sprang on to his shoulder again, anchoring himself by hooking his tail round Osmanazar's neck. The two of them shuffled about behind the counter, turning over things and opening drawers, while Osmanazar, every few seconds, mechanically reached out to start something rocking, evidently plagued by an intolerable staticism.

"Fans! Such fans! What fans!"

HE TURNED with an armful of loot. He clicked fans open, waved them, twirled them, dropped them, while Hassan did the same, giving Osmanazar an effect of having four hands. All round him things were moving, swaying, swinging, rocking, so that Lesley felt bewildered and finally picked out her fan in a slightly hypnotized condition. In the courtyard, sunshine vibrated visibly over the flowers, doves were there alternately grounded and airborne, songbirds and fluted in a jewelled maze, the laughing jackass was at intervals convulsed with demoniac mirth. Even the bead curtain hanging in the doorway of Osmanazar's Bazaar, when they escaped from it, swirled and tinkled and winked in the sun.

"Phew!" said Lesley. "What a place!"

Simon smiled, glanced at his wrist-watch. "I'm afraid I have to go into court, now," he said. "There's a dance tonight at the Bristol. I wonder if you'd like—"

"I'd love it," said Lesley.

"I'll call for you, then, at seven."

Tall, cool, punctilious, he left her.

Wandering curiously in narrow side streets, Lesley emerged presently into air slightly less oven-like on the bastion overlooking the cricket ground.

She leaned with her brown arms on the wide, stone parapet. On the parched ground below, across the sunken, moat-like road, a match was in progress. But it was beyond the ground that she looked. It was the masts and derricks of the harbor that drew her gaze, deeply blue behind her sunglasses. The masts shimmered against the sky. The smooth water within the mole was winked over by the heliograph flash of bumboatmen's oars. Distant across the bay loomed the red, Spanish hills through which she had journeyed.

She wondered which among the forest of masts in the harbor belonged to the yacht *So Far*. It was queer, she thought, but nothing she yet had heard about the trio of penniless adventurers seemed to have altered her feeling of friendship for them. They were traveling for adventure, as in a sense she was herself; they were traveling on a shoestring, and so was she. But that name, *So Far*, had an ominous ring. This was Gibraltar. It was a long way to Australia. If Moresby was still over there in Spain, it would be a case of *No Farther* for the *So Far*.

If he weren't yet back, his friends, Jessop and Bouchot, must be worrying about what had happened to him. It was all very well for Simon to advise her to avoid them, but surely, in common decency, she ought to seek them out, tell them what she knew?

A figure came and leaned against the parapet near her.

Preoccupied with her own troubles, she clicked shut her fan with abrupt decision.

The man beside her said, "Going far?"

She looked at him, her heart leaping.

It was Moresby, lazily filling his pipe, his elbows on the parapet.

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VIII

HE STRUCK a match. The flame was colorless in the sun glare. He grinned at her, his pipe clamped between his strong teeth.

"I've been worried about you," he said.

Lesley drew in her breath. Reaction to the shock he had given her made her tone a shade tart. "I must say, you *look* worried!"

He laughed: "Oh, not since this morning. This morning, after a little detective work around the town, I found out you were at the Peak Hotel, arrived there yesterday. I've been trying to get you on the 'phone there, but you weren't in."

"What did you want me for?"

"Oh, just to let you know I was in the 'Above Have Arrived' list."

"I wasn't," said Lesley airily, "losing any sleep about you." But curiosity overcame her. "When did you get in?"

"Yesterday."

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"What happened to you?" said Lesley impatiently.

"It's a long story," said Moresby. "You were just going, weren't you?"

"As a matter of fact," Lesley said, "I'd just that instant made up my mind to look up your friends on the *So Far.*"

"You wanted to meet them? Charming chaps, you know."

"Possibly," said Lesley. "But I've been warned against all three of you. I'm told you're disreputable characters."

"How right!"

"So it wasn't so much desire," said Lesley, "as a sense of humanity that was about to take me in search of the *So Far*. I wanted to tell your friends that, if you weren't back yet, they might as well abandon hope. For there are also things you should perhaps know about," she added.

"We seem to have things to tell each other," said Moresby.

"As you were going to the yacht, suppose we take that horse coach down there on the moat road? We can talk in privacy, aboard."

In the coach, with the horse clip-clopping along briskly past the old Water Gate and the massive casemates, Moresby said abruptly, "By the way, I hope you understand why I abondoned you as I did?"

"If I didn't," Lesley said, "I shouldn't give you the warning that I'm going to give you."

Moresby looked at her speculatively.

Under the loom of Rock Gun, the towering precipice which faced Spain across the airfield and the neutral territory, the coach swung to the left on to a dusty, palm-lined drive and pulled up before the rambling wooden building of the Calpe Yacht Club.

A cruising yacht which at close quarters seemed large was moored at the end of the jetty.

Lesley looked up at the soaring mast. "So this is the *So Far,*" she said. "Where's your skull-and-crossbones?"

Moresby stepped down in to the cockpit, which was littered with tackle in process of being sorted, and gave her a hand.

"We fly a perfectly respectable burgee," he said.

"They're false colors to Inspector Verano," said Lesley pointedly, and caught Moresby's suddenly hard, startled glance.

A head in a rakish Basque beret was thrust inquiringly from the hatchway.

"This," said Moresby, "is Georges Bouchot. Georges—Miss Jerram."

Georges emerged into the cockpit. He was of medium height and compact build, with an almost pantherish grace of movement. Barefooted, he wore white duck trousers with a heavy leather belt, and an old rugby shirt ringed in black and red. He was about twenty-seven, with a battered, tanned, mobile face and audacious, dark eyes. He swept off his beret with a bow.

"Georges is a man of parts," said Moresby. "He's an ex-professional pianist, an ex-professional boxer, and currently a preceptor in seamanship."

Georges tossed back his hair, pulled on his beret at a vaunting angle. "What would you?" he said, admitting with shrugged shoulders and spread hands to natural genuis as a navigator. "I am a man of Villefranche. All men of Villefranche know the sea by divination." Hospitably, he added, "You like a cup of coffee? With a little pastry of my own make? Wait!"

He dived from view down the hatchway.

"Well," Lesley said, sitting down, "what happened to you and Elena de Vedra?"

Moresby, scraping his pipe with a pocket-knife, leaned against the high coaming.

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"It's not really a long story," he said. "There was nothing to it. The old car ran like a dream. We had no trouble with the *rurales*. Elena's bolthole near Tarifa turned out to be foolproof. The only thing was, I had to leave the car. It's only a temporary loss. I've squared the chap I hired it from, and later on, when all this has blown over, I'll give him the address where he can go and collect it."

"Elena's friends landed you at Tangier?" Lesley asked. "What happened to Elena?"

"I understand she's gone on to Casablanca."

Lesley fanned herself. "And you really think," she said, "that that's all there is to it?"

"Why not?"

"That's what I've come to tell you," said Lesley. "The Spanish have your name and the name of this yacht. It wasn't my doing," she added hastily. "They got it from the hotel at Cadiz. But they compelled me to make a written deposition about what happened at the *Venta de Pacheco*. They may make a complaint to Gibraltar. If they don't, then it's probably because they've got the idea in their heads that you're a British agent."

"How on earth," Moresby exclaimed, "did they get that idea?"

She told him. "Either way," she said, "you're a known and wanted man on Spanish territory."

"If there'd been an official complaint," Moresby said, "Verano would have been down here with handcuffs by now." He looked at her sharply. "What, by the way, do *you* know about Verano?"

"Only that he'd like to make trouble for you," said Lesley. "I heard about it from my father's lawyer here, Simon Beaufoy. I told him, confidentially, what happened on the road from Cadiz. He says that, official complaint or no, if Verano gets wind of what happened, he'll try to make something of it."

"And you," said Moresby, "would be his star witness!"

"I hope not," Lesley said. "I should hate it. If I were you, I should weigh anchor out of Gibraltar before something happens!"

"We shall sail as soon as we're seaworthy," said Moresby, with decision. "Thanks for the warning." He looked at her with keen, brown eyes. "You're staying here long yourself?"

She frowned. "I don't know yet. I—it's something I've got to think about."

SHE glanced up as footsteps sounded on the jetty.

The newcomer was a tall, loose-limbed young man in white shorts and shirt, with a pair of swimming-trunks dangling from one hand and a towel wound bulkly round his neck. His good looks were striking and unusual and the eyes with which he looked down at Lesley from the jetty's edge were a clear gray.

"The lady with the fan!" he exclaimed.

"This is Hal Jessop," said Moresby. "Hal, Miss Jerram."

Jessop dropped down into the cockpit. "I knew you at once, from Jack's description," he said. "We've all been on the look-out for you. We were afraid you might have fallen into durance vile across the frontier."

Georges Bouchot thrust a flushed face from the hatchway. He dumped a steaming coffee-pot and some mugs on the deck. Reverently, he proffered to Lesley an enamel plate bearing some small, charred objects each crowned with a blob of condensed milk.

"Delicious," Lesley said, with a perjured smile.

"All done by divination," said Hal Jessop ironically.

Across the deck from her, he sat leaning forward, his arms on his bare knees, his mug between his hands, his gray eyes fixed on her.

She felt intuitively that more than ash-blond hair set him apart from the hard confidence of Jack Moresby, the gay villainy of Georges Bouchot. Jessop intrigued her, puzzled her.

When, at last, she rose to go, it was he who said, "We shall see you again?"

"I don't know," Lesley said. She looked at Moresby.

"We're sailing just as soon as we're able," he said.

Lesley fanned herself. "I should hate to think anything might prevent you from getting to Australia," she said lightly.

"Why?" said Hal Jessop. He was watching her with a faint smile.

She was annoyed to feel color warm in

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her cheeks. She said, "Because I think I rather envy you the adventure."

Hal laughed wirly. "Envy three hard-up hoboes?"

"Not so hard-up," said Lesley. "The three hundred pounds from Elena de Vedra ought to take you quite a way, surely?" She smiled. "Goodbye. Thanks for the speciality, Georges."

"I'll come and call a horse-coach for you," Moresby said.

As they walked away along the jetty, Lesley was puzzled by a feeling that she had left behind her an atmosphere of sudden tension.

SHE was right. When her *coche* had gone clip-clopping off toward the town, Jack Moresby walked back along the jetty, steeled for trouble.

Georges and Hal were still sitting in the cockpit, nursing their coffee-mugs. Moresby joined them.

"Well," he said, "that was the girl I left behind at Pacheco's. What do you think of her?"

"I'll reserve my opinion on her," Hal said. "But would you like my opinion of you?"

Moresby pickeed up his mug and the coffee-pot. Refilling the mug, he looked at his companions with a hard grin.

"Funny how it slipped out, wasn't it?" he said.

"It was bad luck for you," Hal said. "You'll have to put it in the kitty, now. That'll hurt, Jack, won't it? Nothing matters to you but money. I've learned that since we started on this trip. In the army I never realized it. Money didn't matter much then. Now, I begin to believe you don't care about anything else."

"What was the idea behind our project, anyway," Moresby said, "if it wasn't to use the yacht as a money-maker? There's a packet to be made with her, if we can find the right racket. That's what we were after, wasn't it, from the first? We were agreed on that."

"We thought we were," Hal said bitterly. "We thought we had the same objective, but have we? I begin to wonder. For you, yes—money, first, last and all the time. Even if it means holding out on your partners! Three hundred pounds you got from this Elena de Vedra, and you never said a word about it! No, the help you gave her was just given from a spirit of knight-errantry! Jack, that three hundred goes in the kitty."

"Of course," said Moresby.

He sat down, mug in hand, leaned back against the coaming.

Moresby said evenly, "Georges knew about this three hundred."

"What!"

"It's a fact," said Georges uncomfortably. "He told me."

"So you're ganging up on me?" Hal said. "I've sensed that, somehow."

"There's been no ganging up," Moresby said. "I'll tell you what it is, quite simply. You're weakening, Hal. Georges and I know what we're after. The trouble with you is, you've never been sure. You've half regretted coming in with us from the first. Since that little project went wrong near Lisbon, you've *more* than half regretted it. If you want out, Hal, why don't you get out?"

"How can I? Everything I've got is in my share of this yacht. Besides—"

"Yes?"

"Oh, hell," said Jessop, "I don't know."

"That's exactly it," Moresby said. "You're wavering all the time. Every idea that's put up, you find forty thousand reasons against it. You ought to have left your scruples behind when you came along with us."

"What's this got to do," Jessop said sullenly, "with your telling me nothing about that three hundred, anyway?"

"Just this," said Moresby. "In that escape with Elena de Vedra, I chanced on a bit of information. It's connected with a place called Ramiros, and it has big possibilities—from our point of view. There's a man there with a racket that we might get in on—we and the *So Far*. But if we sit in on this game, there's got to be no wavering. It's going to be dangerous. I've told Georges about it. We were both doubtful about you. I decided to say nothing to you for the moment. I thought we'd get these repairs finished, get ready to sail, and then sound you out. I kept the three hundred in reserve, to use as an instalment to buy you out if you got cold feet."

Jessop looked at him steadily. "I wonder," he said. "I wonder if that's the real

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reason you held out on me, or whether it's an excuse you've just invented. You're plausible, Jack. You always were."

"Do you want to hear the proposition," said Moresby patiently, "or do you want to take the three hundred and get out? Think it over, Hal. There's no hurry."

He rose, mug in hand—and went suddenly rigid, craning to see over the edge of the jetty. On the drive which led up to the Yacht Club building, a horse coach was standing, its canopy dappled by the shade of the palm fronds. A rotund figure in white, with a floppy white linen hat, was in the act of climbing into the coach. The faint jingle of the belled harness reached Morseby as the coach started off along the drive toward the road.

Moresby turned, biting thoughtfully on the stem of his pipe.

"Georges," he said, "while I was away, did you see any sign that the yacht here was being watched?"

"Watched? No!"

"Verano himself," Moresby said, "has just left the Yacht Club. Now, I wonder if he was there just by chance, or whether he was there to take a look at us?"

"Does it matter?" Hal said.

"Matter?" said Moresby sharply. "It might matter a lot, if he saw Lesley Jerram aboard us! I didn't know the set-up when I brought her here. But I can see that it might make a lot of trouble if he suddenly sprang a question at her as to where, when and how she met me!"

LESLEY was in her room at the Peak Hotel, changing for her dinner date with Simon Beaufoy, when the telephone rang. She took up the receiver and a voice said, "Jack here?"

Her heart jumped. "What is it?"

"The fat boy," said Moresby.

She almost exclaimed, "Verando!" She checked herself. "Yes?" she said.

"Our little visit together this afternoon," said Moresby's voice, "was an error of judgment, I'm afraid. I've a feeling it was witnessed by the fat boy. I thought I'd better put you on your guard, in case he comes asking questions about how and where we met. You understand?"

She had a feeling of panic. "What on earth shall I say, if he does?"

"That's rather up to you, isn't it?" said Moresby's voice. "Goodbye."

The line clicked dead.

She stood in thought, her eyes were blue and startled. She wasn't a good liar, and she knew it. That fat, suave, adamant policeman would twist her around his finger. Anyway, why *should* she lie to keep that trio on the yacht out of trouble? They were nothing to her. Nothing. All the same—

It was Simon Beaufoy who showed her the way out of her impasse.

Underworlds faded before that erect, tall figure with the crisp, corn-colored hair, the brown, blunt face—less severe tonight for the absence of the forensic spectacles—and the candidly admiring blue eyes. The white flower in the buttonhole of his flawless double-breasted dinner-jacket was the badge of a well-ordered life.

Returning a napkin-wrapped bottle to the ice-bucket, in the course of dinner, he said to her casually, "Have you thought things over yet?"

"What things?" said Lesley quickly.

"Why, your talk with Peter Azzopardi this morning," said Simon. "Your house at Ramiros—to go or not to go?"

"Ramiros!"

She gazed at him as at a man who suddenly had opened for her the door of a trap—a trap that, here in the sun, somehow had closed around her. She had forgotten Ramiros. It was a way out, a way to elude Verano, to evade all awkward questions. Her decision was instantaneous. She felt as though a load had been lifted from her mind. Her spirits soared.

"Oh, yes," she said, "I've quite decided about that. There's a ship from Valencia to Palma twice a week. From Palma, it's easy. I have my visa. After all, Simon, this is what I came out for, isn't it? And I promised my father."

"You're going?" he said incredulously.

She drew a deep breath. "First thing in the morning!"

(*Part II in the next* SHORT STORIES)

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He—Officer Nanovic—Was Only a Mike Jockey; Action Was Something That Was Always Somewhere Else

NIGHT SHIFT

By WILBUR S. PEACOCK

OFFICER THOMAS NANOVIC, shield 4302, straightened his tie in the dressing room and sighed boredly at his reflection. Sergeant Kramer looked up from tying his shoelaces, and his grizzled head shook in amusement.

"Take it easy, Tom," he said. "You'll get your chance."

"Oh, sure!" Nanovic lit a cigarette and leaned against the wall. "I'll get a chance, like hell I will. Where've I been these last eight months, I ask you? Right on that mike, that's where."

"So what!" the sergeant said. "Somebody has to do it; and you don't have to worry about rain or snow or sore dogs."

Nanovic grinned. "Yeah, well, I'm getting what is known as announcer's spread. All I do is sit and talk. I didn't join the force just to speak pieces. Hell, I'm bored stiff!"

Kramer stamped his shoes comfortably into position and came to his feet. "Come on, hero," he said. "We've got some sitting and talking to do." He grinned openly. "Maybe we'll be invaded, and then you can use that shiny little pistol."

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"Nuts!" Officer Nanovic said, but he was grinning as he followed the sergeant from the room.

They paced along the corridor, hearing the rush of a shower and the water-blurred whistling of a bather. The floor vibrated slightly from the generators in the basement, and the odor of fresh paint came from the game room where off-duty cops were reclaiming worn toys for the Christmas drive.

Kramer palmed open the swinging door, going around a desk and standing at the front of the cubicle, yawning a bit as he took over the desk from Doltz.

"Anything cooking?" he asked, and Doltz shook his head.

"Usual stuff, penny ante," he admitted, and slid from the chair. "Haven't had a good lead on Contagna and his buddy all night."

Officer Nanovic ignored the routine. Every night for eight months he had heard the same questions and answers between Kramer and Doltz. His ears closed automatically now when the routine began.

He tapped Benton on the shoulder. "Out," he said. "Go burn the candle at both ends."

Benton grinned into his face. "Still griping, eh?" he asked. "Well, better soft-pedal it tonight; the captain's on a rampage. Everybody from the Mayor down is sore as hell because Contagna is still playing tag."

"Who cares!" Nanovic said indifferently. "Me, I'm a mike jockey; I just talk."

He slid into the vacated chair, checking the dials almost indifferently. Static squealed softly in the speaker, and he rubbed it out with a control.

"Flynn reporting," the speaker said tinnily. "Checked on the 38. Cat playing with a ball."

"Okay, Flynn," Nanovic said into the mike, fingering the control.

He cut the switch and jerked his thumb imperatively. "Out," he said. "Officer Nanovic is holding crime in check."

"Hold the fort," Benton said, and went through the door.

TOM NANOVIC leaned back in the chair, adjusting his legs to the low desk height and stifling a yawn. Eight hours of this lay ahead of him. Eight hours of relaying orders to the squad cars and taking their reports. From ten to six he'd listen to reports of burglars on rooftops who turned out to be cats playing with rubber balls.

"S'long," he said automatically to Doltz, and as automatically took the night sheet from Sergeant Kramer's hand and scanned the enteries.

A prowler at 1392 Hempstead. Radio call sent out. Stolen wallet. Reported to pickpocket detail. Two drunks booked for annoying women. Vagrant booked and held for morning court.

"What a night," he commented gloomily.

"It'll pick up around midnight; it always does," the sergeant said cheerfully, and began filling out reports with a scratchy pen.

Nanovic checked the squad chart. Red lines crossed and recrossed the map in a lattice design, and numbered pins marked the position of each car. He felt a faint thrill of pride in that. Nowhere could a hunk of trouble explode but that a dozen squads could jump it within four minutes.

The speaker cleared its throat experimentally. "Car 27 reporting. Everything okay."

Nanovic picked up the mike. "All right, 27," he said. "Let's get going boys; check in by number."

He made cryptic marks on the car sheet, as the squad cars checked in number by number. Minutes passed, and with the checking finished, he signed an okay and leaned back in his chair.

He wondered what Meg was doing now. The kid would be in bed long before this and she could relax. Probably listening to Red Skelton and knitting the afghan which never seemed to get finished. He closed his eyes, picturing the scene, and the first hint of Captain Morgan's presence was the grating sound of his voice.

"Nanovic," the captain said bitingly, "if you're that tired maybe I can find somebody to relieve you."

Tom Nanovic flushed guiltily, coming upright in the chair, conscious of the laughter in the sergeant's eyes.

"I wasn't dozing, sir," he said. "I was just resting my eyes."

Captain Morgan scowled. "Rest your eyes off the job," he said, and handed a flimsy across the counter. "Get this off at once."

"Yes, sir," Nanovic said.

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He watched from the corner of his eyes, saw the hesitation in the captain, then the man turned and reentered his office. Sergeant Kramer laughed openly.

"Shoulda used your gun and told him where to get off," he said dryly.

"Baloney!" Nanovic said, and opened the switch on the mike. "Calling cars 29, 51, 36," he said evenly, catching the numbers from the mapboard. "It's a 42, a four two, at 655 Elm Street. Proceed with caution. This may be it, boys." Excitement brightened his eyes. "Check in, cars 29, 51 and 36."

"Makin checking; be there in three minutes," the speaker said, and a moment later the other two cars checked in.

Nanovic cut the switch. "There it is," he said to Kramer. "Maybe that's Contagna and his pal; maybe there will be fireworks. And me, I'll be stuck here at this damned mike."

The sergeant grinned, lifting the receiver of the desk phone. "Headquarters," he said. "Sergeant Kramer speaking."

He listened, red creeping into his ears, trying to speak, the voice in the receiver growing louder and louder. Tom Nanovic grinned; always the citizen was aroused, always were the cops unable to do anything but spend taxpayers' money. Always was the citizen sore.

"Yes, sir, yes, Mr. Blake, yes, sir," the sergeant was saying, penciling notes on a pad. "Yes, sir, I'm sorry, sir. I'll put out a call right away. We'll let you know."

He hung up, scowling at the phone as though it had bitten him. Then slow humor came back to his eyes, and he was grinning as he handed his notes to Nanovic.

"Mr. Blake is irritated, to put it mildly," he said. "Seems some unprincipled rascal ran off with his nice car—which he had carefully forgotten to lock. Some people!" he finished in disgust.

Nanovic leaned over the mike, clicking the switch. "Attention all cars," he said. "Stolen car. Repeat, stolen car. Buick, forty-two sedan. Light green. License plate CB4539, repeat, license plate CB4539. That's all."

He leaned back, surreptitiously lighting a cigarette and keeping it hidden beneath the table edge. The sergeant was busy on his reports again, and the big room was empty, gray walls dirty-looking in the glare of the ceiling lights.

HE WONDERED what it would be like to own a big car. His was a job ten years old now. Oh, it got around all right, but that wasn't the point. He'd like a new one; and if he were outside now, he might get the money. Rewards on Contagna and his pal were big enough to buy any make car for the man who brought him in.

He frowned, thinking of that. Contagna and his buddy were particularly nasty killers. Their records, that is, Contagna's record, was as dirty as any crook's could be. And now, with murder behind them, they'd shoot first and ask questions later.

He sighed. Somebody would pick them off, and he'd sit before the mike, useless .38 at his side, not doing a damned thing but talking into a chunk of vibrating metal.

He conjured up a memory of Contagna's picture. Almost pretty, sulky mouth pouting, eyes as dark-lashed as a girl's. Small, and as vicious as a coral snake. He'd worked his way up to his present eminence, making all the rackets from women to loft jobs. And now he'd tagged himself with the biggest mark of all. He was a goner, for sure, sooner of later, for cops just don't like killers.

But there'd be a fight when he was taken. His hand had grown to like a gun, and he had nothing to lose. As for his partner, well, his description could fit a thousand men. Tall, heavy faced, a slight limp in his right foot. He was new, as far as the cops knew, probably sent in to finger Contagna's victim, for he, too, had been from out of town.

Officer Nanovic shrugged. It meant nothing to him personally; he was only a mike jockey.

The minutes went by. Makin checked in and reported the 42 was only a case of tramps using a vaction-vacant house for a resting place. The tramps were being brought in for booking at the nearest precinct station.

Routine calls came in. The sergeant's pen squeaked like mice eating matches, and cigarette stubs piled neatly near the corner of Nanovic's radio desk. Captain Morgan called to ask if any salient reports had come in, then swore briefly and hung up. This Contagna case was getting him down.

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AT TWELVE-THIRTY, Lou Toriano came into the station, spluttering broken English like a machine, waving his hands, and crying for justice. He was very excited, and Sergeant Kramer spent five minutes in calming him to the point his words became intelligible.

"She'sa gone!" he cried. "Somebody breaka into my store and steala da spray' and da paint." He rocked his head in anguish. "Mama mia, what I do now?"

Sergeant Kramer oozed sympathy, dragging fact after slow fact from the man. Toricano had a small painting business, doing odd jobs, repairing; and tonight, after returning from a late movie, he had entered his shop to finish a job he had promised for the morning. And there he had found a rear window broken, sneak thieves having stolen a small power sprayer, several gallons of crimson enamel and sundry other articles. Value, all told, some eighty-five dollars. Toriano was disconsolate.

Sergeant Kramer jotted down the facts, then directed the painter to Lieutenant Oliver's office. There he would receive a certain amount of consolation, and within minutes police action would be taken.

Sergeant Kramer watched the little man go down the side hall, and sympathy lay in his eyes.

"That hit him pretty hard," he said. "Eighty-five bucks is a lot of dough."

Tom Nanovic nodded in understanding. The radio was busier now. For some unfathomable reason, people grew more reckless in the early morning hours. Cars sped faster, drunks were more boisterous, family fights exploded. He worked busily, wishing the corner restaurant would hurry with the cartons of coffee and thick beef sandwiches.

"Jenkins reporting," the receiver said. "Am at corner of Larkspur and Kessel. Looks like a loft job. Patton taking a look. Hold it, here he comes now."

The voice changed, grew swifter, younger, a bit out of breath. "It's a loft job," the voice said. "Eight sixteen Larkspur. I figure five men. We'll hold them."

"Got it," Nanovic said, and reached for the desk phone. "Hold on," he said into the mike, then dialed with his index finger. "Lieutenant," he said into the mouthpiece, "this is the dispatcher. A loft job at eight sixteen Larkspur. Five men. Car 14 holding the job." He nodded, hearing the brisk instructions. "Yes, sir." He swung back to the mike. "Cars 19 and 33 to Larkspur and Kessel," he snapped. "Repeat, cars 19 and 33 to Larkspur and Kessel. Signal 7. Contact car 12. Lieutenant Elgerson on his way. Check in, 19 and 33."

"Nineteen on way," the radio said clearly. "Thirty Three on way," a second voice cut in like a warped echo.

TOM NANOVIC grinned. Five men were due for a hot surprise.

"I'd hate to be a crook," he said to the sergeant.

"Uh huh!" Sergeant Kramer said, not caring. After thirty years, even a sergeant has trouble in becoming excited over vagrant thoughts. He opened the sack delivered by the restaurant porter, and handed coffee carton and sandwich to Nanovic.

"Just think—" Nanovic said around a bit of beef and bread.

"Of what?" Kramer said.

"Oh," Nanovic grinned, "of what I could do to those loft boys. I rated plenty high on the tests."

"Ha!" Sergeant Kramer said. "Tests!"

"Yeah, tests!" Nanovic answered belligerently. "After all, they must mean something. Lord knows we sweated over them enough!"

"My boy," Sergeant Kramer said from the heights of long experience, "those tests could be done by a four year old with a bent leg." He sucked noisily at the coffee carton. "Grades and medals don't mean a thing in a dark alley when you're playing squat-tag with a flock of gun-dummies." He grinned. "Of course, though, you're the exception!" he mended mockingly. "You've got guts!"

"I'm speaking of men, not beat up sergeants who have more lead in their pants than in their gun-belts," Tom Nanovic said.

"You and Dick Tracy!" the sergeant said, and finished his coffee.

Officer Nanovic grinned, then made his two o'clock check with the cars. Nothing of importance; usual routine. The voices sounded bored. He filled in the report sheet, then leaned back in the chair, idly twisting a cigarette in his fingers.

Solly Steingman, of the *Herald*, came into the station, yawning briefly, then twist-

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ing the sergeant's night sheet around with casual familiarity.

"What's cooking?" he asked.

"Tom, here," the sergeant said. "He wants to be a hero."

Solly grinned. "You'll grow out of it," he said, and jotted down a couple of items before thrusting the sheet back. "Wish I was home in bed," he confided.

"You and me both," Kramer said.

The speaker lifted sound. "Elgerson here," it said. "No trouble. Bringing them in."

"All right, Elgerson," Nanovic said into the mike.

"What's that?" Solly Steingman asked.

"Loft job," Tom Nanovic explained. "Eight sixteen Larkspur. Better check with the lieutenant before you spill anything."

"Can do," Solly agreed. He jerked his thumb at the captain's door. "What gives with Morgan?" he asked.

"Don't ask me," Nanovic said, shrugging. "I just sit here and talk."

Solly grinned. "You could do worse," he admitted. "The grapevine tells me scalps will dangle unless Contagna is brought in within the next twenty-four hours. His Honor is putting the squeeze on, right down the line."

"His Honor is a stuffed, pot-bellied jerk!" the sergeant said judiciously.

He lifted the ringing phone, pencil lifting automatically over the pad. "Headquarters," he said. "Sergeant Kramer speaking." His pencil made little twists and curleycues which to him was writing. "Yes, ma'am, yes, ma'am. . . . What? Yes, ma'am. A boy . . . no description. . . . Yes, ma'am . . . Clothes . . . Yes, ma'am, I'll have the beat officer stop in for more details. . . . Yes, ma'am, 211 Dyckman. . . . Thank you!"

He pronged the receiver.

"Windows peepers," Solly Steingman hazarded a guess.

The sergeant shook his head. "Sneak thief on roof. Stole part of woman's laundry hanging out to dry." He swung to Nanovic. "Better have it checked."

Tom Nanovic shrugged and reached for the mike. His gaze was on the map, and he found the address even as he thumbed the switch.

"Calling car 20, car two o," he intoned. "It's a 9 at 211 Dyckman." He read the sergeant's lips. "Apartment 6K. Check in, 20."

"Tilman here," the loudspeaker answered. "Right on top of it."

Officer Nanovic cut the switch and swung to the reporter. "There you are, Solly," he said. "Adventure in the raw, crime catching at its peak of efficiency. Heroes with badges and blazing guns. Boy, what a story."

"Boy, what a bellyache!" Steingman said morosely.

Nanovic flushed. "Look," he argued, 'it doesn't take any brains to talk into this thing. The chief called in everybody, and they're all looking for Contagna. Why the hell should I have to sit here and play like a disc jockey without records!"

"You asking or telling?" Solly said.

"Nuts!" Nanovic said bitterly and lit a cigarette.

"All right, bright boy," Sergeant Kramer said, "since you know so much, what would you do to pull in Contagna?"

"Well," Officer Nanovic spread his hands. "I'd—I'd—"

"Me, too," Kramer said caustically.

"Nanovic!" Captain Morgan's voice broke in from his door. "If I catch you smoking on duty again, you'll rate a two week suspension."

"Sorry, sir, I forgot," Tom Nanovic said, and crushed the cigarette beneath his heel.

The captain came toward the desk, ignoring the reporter. "Anything turn up?" he asked, and fatigue made his voice gray.

"No, sir."

Captain Morgan turned away, going toward his office, the line of his shoulders sagging now. A sense of sympathy touched Nanovic.

"He's a good egg," Sergeant Kramer said thoughtfully.

There was noise at the street door, then three men came through, one patrolman herding two drunks across the room. His face was patient, for he had done this many times before.

"Drunk, disorderly, resisting an officer," he said wearily. "Hi, Sarge, Hi, Tom."

Sergeant Kramer got out papers. "What's your name?" he asked the first drunk.

"I'll have you know I'm an important—"

"Your name?" Kramer said more sharply.

The drunk licked his lips. "Look," he said, "we weren't fighting; we're buddies."

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He threw an arm about the shoulders of his companion, and the second drunk immediately belted him in the stomach. He sagged, gasping for air, then tried to climb his buddy. Somehow, accidentally, the arresting officer, in reaching for them, banged their heads together. They yelped in pain, then subsided.

"Your names?" the sergeant said imperturbably.

Officer Tom Nanovic closed his ears against the questions and answers. Dimly, he heard the man explaining, then their argument, and finally their protests as they were led to the tank to wait their turn at morning court.

The radio squawked its reports. A fight at Central and Grove. An emergency at 462 Riverside, two cars, ambulance needed. Routine reports of nothing stirring.

STEINGMAN settled down on the bench, cocking his hat over his eyes, trying to catch a cat-nap. The sergeant finished his reports and caught up on his reading of Terrifying Detective Cases, shaking his head in marvel at the perspicacity of the intrepid police detectives.

Minutes rolled along, one following the other with a frightful precision. Nanovic considered lighting a cigarette, then gave up the idea. He finished the cold coffee in his carton, then propped elbows on the desk and let his thoughts wander where they chose.

He thought of fishing, cold water reaching up booted legs, Royal Coachman flicking lightly across tiny riffles. He sighed; summer was a long way off.

He answered calls automatically, forgetting them immediately. His fingers adjusted the angles of a few pins on the squad car map, and his gaze ran from line to line, until he almost dozed.

He wondered where Contagna was now. Holed up, probably, for the net had been spread within minutes after the murder. He and his pal were hidden somewhere in the midst of those red lines. How long he could take the squeeze was a matter of conjecture; some guys stayed for months in some rat hole. Still, Contagna wasn't that type; he'd blow eventually, and try to make a break for safety. Fat chance he'd have, for the the roads and tunnels and bridges and trains and buses were covered with a blanket nothing could get through.

He heard the sergeant's voice at the phone. "Okay, Pat, I got it."

"Got what?" Nanovic asked, not really caring.

"Prowlers in a private garage at 380 Dyckman," the sergeant said. "Nothing taken."

"Oh!" Nanovic yawned, glancing at the clock. Two hours still to go of a typically dull night.

He relaxed again, staring blankly at the map. A thought intruded, and he thrust it away. It nibbled at his senses, and he growled in irritation, trying to fish again. The thought yelled for acceptance, and he let it slide into his mind.

"Hey!" he said, sitting upright.

"Huh!" Sergeant Kramer said. "What's eating you?"

"Hey, maybe I've got something."

"Yeah, you've got ants. Now go back to sleep."

"No, listen!" Officer Nanovic said. "Call that last guy who reported prowlers. Ask him to check his car and see if the plates are missing."

"Aw, you're nuts!" Sergeant Kramer said. "The guy said nothing—"

"Gimmie that sheet," Nanovic said, and reached for the night sheet, reading down the columns, then staring at the map. After a moment, he licked his lips in wonder. "It could be," he said to himself.

"What could be?" Solly Steingman asked from the bench.

"He's blown his top, like I always predicted," the sergeant said.

"You make that call," Nanovic said. "I'm going to see Morgan."

"You bother him and he'll use your hide for a floor rug," Kramer warned.

But Officer Nanovic wasn't listening. He slid from the chair and went through the gate and across the room to the captain's door. His knuckles drew echoes from the room, and then he entered.

"Yes, Nanovic?" Captain Morgan said. "Something come in?"

"I don't know," Nanovic said, flushing, and laid the night sheet on the desk.

Captain Morgan glanced at it, then raised his gaze impatiently.

"Well?" he prompted.

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"Look," Officer Nanovic swallowed, and pointed at the entries, "Contagna must be about ready to make a break; he isn't the kind to stay cooped up."

"Nanovic," Captain Morgan said in deadly patience. "I know that; everybody knows that." He pushed the paper with his hand. "Just what the hell are you getting at?"

"I've got an idea," Nanovic said. "It sounds screwy, but it might have something." He pointed at the entries again. "Look, there's a car stolen, and women's clothes stolen, and a sprayer and paint stolen, and—"

Morgan lifted the ringing phone. He listened, then said thanks and cradled the receiver.

"That was Kramer," he said. "Plates were switched on the car in somebody's garage." He frowned. "What's this all about?"

"That ties it!" Nanovic said, and felt perspiration on his face. "Look at the addresses of the places where those things took place. Switched plates and stolen women's clothes on Dyckman. A stolen car and stolen sprayer and paint on Market—and all four things happening within a four block area."

"So?" Captain Morgan said puzzledly.

"I figure it this way. Contagna and his pal stole the Buick. Then they stole the sprayer and enamel and gave it a fire engine job. They switched plates, leaving the Buick's on the garaged car, figuring it wouldn't be noticed for a couple of days. And to cap it, Contagna stole women's clothes. That adds up to only one thing. Contagna and his pal will try to get out through the morning rush of traffic, driving a car so blatantly red it sticks out of traffic like a sore thumb. And riding in that car will be Contagna, dressed like a woman, his pal with him or hidden somewhere in the car."

"Maybe!" Captain Morgan was saying. "Maybe!" He frowned, then glanced at his wrist-watch. A slow tired smile touched his mouth. "Okay, Nanovic, it's worth a try," he finished. "We've nothing to lose and everything to gain. Get it on the air."

"Yes, sir!" Nanovic said and caught up the night sheet. He went toward the door, and the floor was sponge rubber, and strangely, his heart was a triphammer in his chest.

"Nanovic?" Captain Morgan's voice stopped him at the door.

"Yes, sir!"

Captain Morgan smiled. "If this pans out," he said, "you'll just about inherit the City Hall."

Nanovic was grinning as he shut the door.

THE dressing room was empty except for Officer Tom Nanovic and Sergeant Kramer. The sergeant was changing his shoes, grunting a bit as he bent to tie the laces, while the other paced in quick excitement along the row of lockers.

"Just think," Nanovic said, "Contagna tried to shoot his way out, and Mulraney and Stevens outshot him." He banged fist into open palm. "Man, what a break. Stevens is probationary; he'll get a citation for this."

"Good for him," Kramer said indifferently.

"Oh, sure, you're casual as hell," Nanovic said. "Boy, what I wouldn't give for a chance to be in on these things." He scowled. "But no, I'm stuck with that damned radio."

"Tsk, tsk!" Kramer clucked his tongue. "My heart bleeds for you."

Officer Nanovic lit a cigarette. "What chance for action has a guy got at that mike?" he complained. "I sit on my fanny and talk to guys I can't even see. *Real* cops do what I tell them to do."

"Do they now!" the sergeant asked, straightening.

"Sure!" Nanovic blew smoke, his eyes glistening with the excitement of his thoughts. "Boy, what wouldn't I have given to ride that car." He nodded his head judicially. "That's the only way a man can become a real cop."

Sergeant Kramer grinned and shrugged into his civvie coat.

"Listen, hero—" he began.

"Nanovic!" Captain Morgan said from the doorway. "Look, the Commissioner is coming down and wants to talk to you." He circled thumb and forefinger in a victory sign. "The City Hall is yours. Congratulations."

"Well, what do you know—you *are* a hero!" Sergeant Kramer said without malice. "There you are; now you'll ride a car with

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the best of them. Fact is, you might even rate the Detective Bureau."

"Huh, oh, sure!" Officer Nanovic watched the doorway which was completely empty now.

Kramer grinned, and his hand slammed affectionately on Nanovic's shoulder.

"COME on and we'll get some coffee before the Commissioner arrives," he said. "You can tell me exactly what it is that makes you tick."

"But, Sarge—" Officer Nanovic began.

"Yeah!" Sergeant Kramer's voice was brusque, but amusement lay deep in his wise eyes.

"But I'm a radioman."

The sergeant scratched his chin. "Not now," he said. "You're on the way up."

"But what if some probationary jams the calls, what then?"

"That's the department's problem."

"But somebody may get hurt."

Sergeant Kramer sighed. "Look, hero," he said, "you wanted away from that mike, and now you're away."

"But I don't want away."

"Huh!" Sergeant Kramer's eyes showed no surprise.

Officer Nanovic flushed. "Look, they just can't take me away, can they?"

Sergeant Kramer masked a grin with his hand, rubbing it away.

"The City Hall is apparently yours," he said thoughtfully. "I imagine the Commissioner would settle for that chair before the mike."

Officer Nanovic grinned. "Good," he said, "then I stay."

He turned away, going toward the door, and stepped aside to let a beat patrolman enter.

"Hi, Nanovic," the patrolman said. "Anything new?"

"Ha!" Nanovic laughed caustically, the old routine too strong. "What would be new? A fat chance a guy has for excite—"

"City Hall, remember!" Sergeant Kramer said.

Officer Nanovic laughed aloud then, and the brooding was gone from his eyes. Now he was as he would always be, conscious of his place in departmental life, knowing all cogs were importnat, each doing an important job.

"What's eating him?" the patrolman asked the sergeant.

Sergeant Kramer grinned, as Nanovic unconsciously polished shield 4302 on his blouse front. "He just discovers he's a cop," he said from the depths of his own experience.

In the old days there weren't any chechakos along the cricks. By the time a man was six months in the country, he was either a sourdough—or he was dead.

"LUCK RUNNING"

A novelette in our next issue by

JAMES B. HENDRYX

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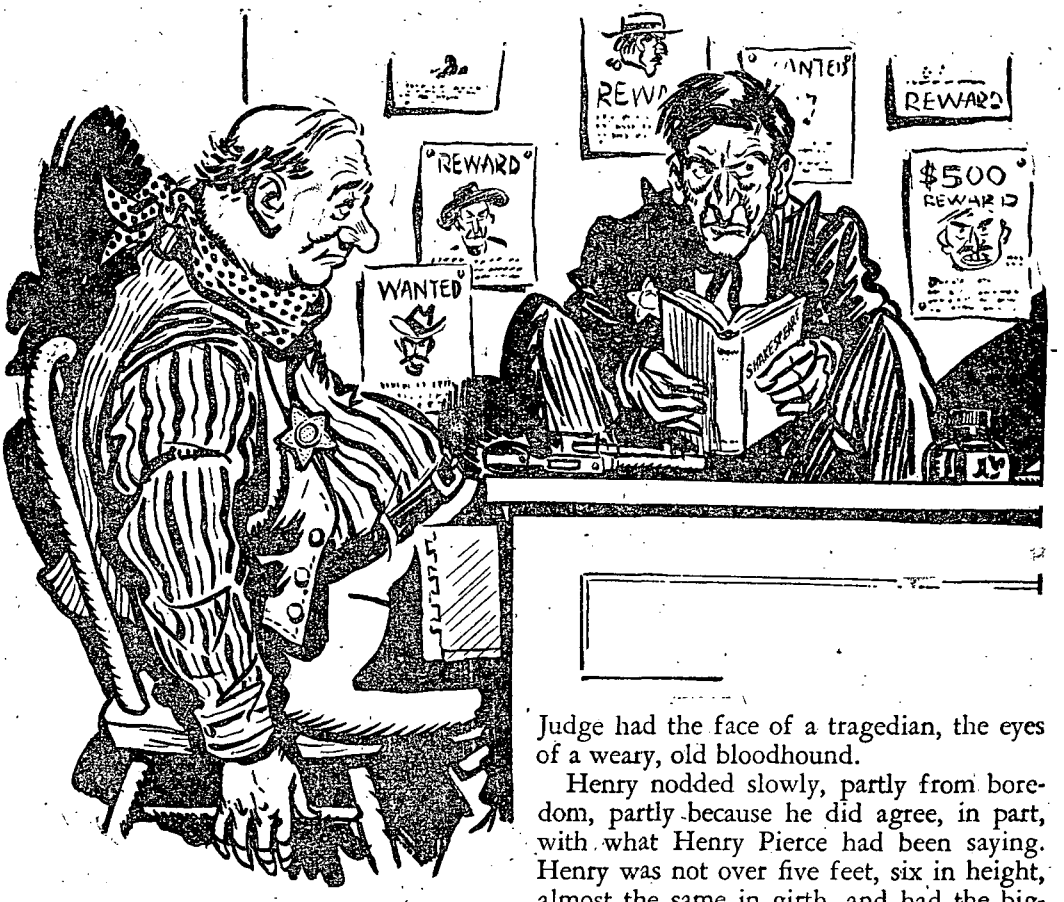
THE DUMB STILL LIVE

By W. C. TUTTLE



HENRY HARRISON CONROY, sheriff of Wild Horse Valley, did not seem at all perturbed. He sat calmly at his desk, listening to a discourse by Henry Pierce, proprietor of the general store in Tonto City. With Henry Pierce were James Bailey, owner of the stage line, and Edward Parker, owner of the Lazy L cattle ranch. These three men comprised the County Commissioners of the valley.

On the opposite side of the room, tilted back in a chair, his bony knees almost to his chin, sat "Judge" Van Treece, deputy sheriff. He had a dog-eared copy of Shakespeare in his hands, but his ears were not tuned to the ballads of the Bard of Avon. Judge had the face of a tragedian, the eyes of a weary, old bloodhound.

Henry nodded slowly, partly from boredom, partly because he did agree, in part, with what Henry Pierce had been saying. Henry was not over five feet, six in height, almost the same in girth, and had the biggest and reddest nose ever seen in Arizona. He was almost bald, and his small, almost round eyes, seemed to look at the world with suppressed amazement.

"You agree that the situation is damnable?" asked Pierce.

"Sir," replied Henry soberly, "I am a most agreeable person."

"Good!" exclaimed Parker. "Then you agree that the situation is beyond your ability to handle. Our scheme is simple. While the criminals seek to confound you, the man we shall bring in will handle it. We didn't dare ask for help from the Cattlemen's Association. What we must have is a man totally unknown in this country. Such a man is Slim Partee, highly recommended to us

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On Close Inspection Sometimes an Olive Branch Can Turn Out to Be Poison Oak. One Theory of the Sheriff of Wild Horse Valley Was That to Be Effective a Detective Had to Be Alive

by cattlemen in Montana. He will stay at my ranch, appearing to work for me. Of course, we will not restrict him in any way. Sheriff, I'm glad to know that you have no objections to our plan. This wave of crime must be checked. Gentlemen, I believe this is all we have to say to the sheriff."

The three men, mumbling among themselves, left the office. Henry's eyes strayed to the face of his deputy, blinked violently, and turned away.

"You are a most agreeable person," remarked Judge.

Henry yawned and his chair creaked warningly.

"Someone, my dear Judge, is seeking to confound us," he announced.

Judge was staring toward the open doorway, as he said slowly, "When you agreed that the situation is beyond your ability to handle."

"You make it sound embarrassing, Judge. "After all—"

"I know, Henry. It is damnable. Usurpation of power—unable to handle—crime waves, threatening to inundate our society. It makes me seethe internally. Damned upstarts! Why, a little over a year ago, none of these three men were known in Wild Horse Valley. They came, they saw—and they have conquered. They reside here less than a year, get elected and——"

"Blame it on gold, Judge," said Henry mildly. "With only the Golden Calf and the Shoshone Chief in production, we ran on an even keel for a long time. But when the Antelope and the Mary Ellen, opening up the two richest veins of gold in the country, men flocked to our town, bringing finances, buying right and left. Gold brings crime; so blame gold."

Judge laid his book on his lap, rehooked

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his high heels over the one unbroken rung on his chair, and stared thoughtfully.

"They have ruined Tonto City," he said slowly. "The last boom brought crime, too, Henry. We worked hard—to stop it. I'll admit that the bank robbery at the Scorpion Bend bank put a crimp in the Shoshone Chief. Thirty thousand dollars is a lot of money. When they stopped the stage near here and took away twenty-five thousand dollars, belonging to the Golden Calf—and murdered the stage driver."

"Would you care to stand up with me and sing the last verse?" asked Henry soberly. "They broke into the Antelope office, blew the safe and got away with close to a hundred pounds of golden ingots. I believe that is the last entry in the crime register."

"As of today and at," Judge looked at his watch, "just twenty minutes after one o'clock."

"You are a very exacting person, Judge," said Henry wearily. "Now that we have recited all our failures, what is there to do, except to await the coming of that sagebrush Sherlock, named Slim Partee?"

Judge uncoupled from his chair and stood up. He was inches more than six feet tall, even with his stooped shoulders. Slowly he went over to the open doorway, where he hunched a little more, looking out at the street. The main street of Tonto City was dusty, the traffic not too heavy at this time of the day. A wagon came into the street, heading to come past the office. Judge snorted quietly, and said:

"Here comes that crazy Tony Vasquez, bringing that grizzly to town again."

"Ed Parker bought it," said Henry. "He's sending it to some zoo. I hear he made money on the deal. Tony offered the animal for a hundred dollars; a magnificent brute, weighin' close to twelve hundred pounds on the hay-scales. A fine specimen of ursus horribilus."

"Damnably dangerous brute," added Judge. "If he ever got loose—"

THE wagon with the huge, wooden cage, stopped nearly directly across the street from the sheriff's office, and a crowd quickly gathered. In fact, within a few minutes most everybody in town had gathered around the caged animal, which glared its hate through the heavy wooden bars. A four-horse team and heavy freight-wagon drew up, and a group of men conferred on a transfer of the heavy cage to the bigger wagon. Henry and Judge stood in the doorway of the office and watched the proceedings. Ed Parker, who had purchased the animal from Tony Vasquez, was trying to direct things. Except for two little girls and one small boy, the spectators were all adults.

Henry said, "I don't like to see those children out there, Judge. Even if the grizzly is unable to injure them, they might be trampled by the unthinking populace."

"That tiny tot in red is Tom Lorenz's daughter," said Judge. Tom Lorenz was a gambler at the King's Castle Saloon.

"I am not worried over her parentage," said Henry, "but I should hate to see her stepped on. Well, the board of strategy has evidently adopted a method of making the transfer."

A man came with two long sections of plank, which they were trying to place under the end of the bear cage. It was evident that the idea was to slide the cage to the ground on the two planks, and then load it into the bigger wagon. Volunteers were scarce, no one caring to get in reach of those huge claws. The cage creaked warningly, as they managed to slide it back a few inches, and the grizzly grunted, like a mammoth pig.

It was a slow process, but the cage slid further and further along the planks, until it was almost on a balance. Men were shouting orders and advice, which no one seemed to take seriously. Two ropes had been tied to the front end of the cage, and men piled into the wagon to try and slow the descent of the cage.

Suddenly the huge brute lunged backwards against the rear end of the cage, throwing it completely out of balance. The front end lifted, swung sideways against the side of the wagon-box, and one of the planks slid away. Before anything could be done about it, the cage tilted sideways, slid completely off the other plank, and came down with a crash, splintering the cage.

Yelling a warning, that crowd scattered like quail going to cover. The tiny girl in the red dress was knocked flat in the dust, but the other two ran a dozen feet, stopped, undecided what to do next. Tony Vasquez's

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team decided it was time to leave Tonto City, and the driver of the four had his troubles, too. Spooky from the scent of grizzly, the wheel team reared and lunged ahead, one horse getting both front feet over the spreaders, and going down with a crash, while the others, badly frightened, proceeded to kick everything loose in reach.

One side of the cage splintered loose, and out came the grizzly, shedding parts of the broken cage, its roach standing up like the quills on a porcupine. Roaring its defiance, the huge brute swung around, facing the little girl in red, who was sitting up, crying. The other two stood there as though petrified. Men screamed at them to run, but all they saw or heard was that huge, grunting brute. Suddenly the bear lowered its head and came on toward the little tot. Its purpose was never made clear, because here was Henry Harrison Conroy, coming in a waddling run from the front of the office, gun in hand.

The bear halted, the end of his nose almost against the dusty red of the little girl's dress, swung up his head and looked at Henry. Possibly, in the bear's mind, this was a distinct violation of accepted rules of conduct. Men were not supposed to walk up to a grizzly bear. Henry didn't stop. He was staring right into the flaming eyes of that big bear, as he came forward, the forty-five clenched in his right fist. Only about four feet separated them, when the bear turned, whirled around swiftly, seemed to realize for the first time that it was free. A dog yapped from over on the sidewalk, and that big grizzly headed right up the main street, not at all with any show of dignity, but with an intense desire to rid itself of humanity. Several dogs took out after it, and it is recorded that none of them came back.

Henry, his knees shaking, picked up the little girl in red, dusted off her dress, and carried her over to the front of the King's Castle Saloon, when her father, his face the color of wood ashes, took her from him. The other two tots were trailing Henry, having decided that it was time to cry about it.

Judge came over, just a bit unsteady over the whole thing, and watched men slapping Henry on the back. Henry didn't mind. He had the gun shoved inside the waistband of his overalls. Then the two of them walked back to the office. Tony was picking up the smashed cage, and moving it out of the street.

They went into the office and Henry placed the six-shooter on his desk, where he had picked it up. Judge said, "Henry, that was a mighty nervy thing to do. Suppose the grizzly hadn't run away from you."

"I should have killed him," said Henry huskily.

"That," remarked Judge, "would have been a miracle, far beyond those recorded in the Bible, Henry."

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded Henry.

"That gun," replied Judge, pointing a bony finger at the weapon, "is the one with the broken spring, which I was going to have fixed. It hasn't even been loaded for months."

Henry looked thoughtfully at Judge and at the useless gun on the desk-top. Judge said soberly, "It all goes to show that what you don't know, won't hurt you, Henry."

"And I do not know grizzly bears, Judge. I wonder—"

A man came running down the sidewalk, grabbed the side of the doorway and came inside the office on the run. He jerked to a stop, and blurted, "They've robbed the bank!"

Then he leaped outside and ran back the way he came. It was all done so fast that Henry and Judge merely stared at each other. Suddenly Henry blurted, "He said the bank had been robbed!"

"He said," corrected Judge, "that they've robbed the bank. Same thing, I suppose."

THEY ran out and headed for the bank, where a crowd was collecting. Shoving their way inside through the crowd, they found Dale Jensen, the cashier of the bank, sprawled on the floor near the vault, his head beaten to a pulp.

"Henry, they've killed Jensen and robbed the vault!" someone shouted.

Henry and Judge managed to get the crowd back. Dr. Bogart, who was also the coroner, managed to get through to the body, where he made a short examination, pronouncing the man dead. Tom Heffner, the new manager of the bank, coming back from his noon dinner, discovered the body and the open vault.

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Henry ordered everybody outside, while Heffner made a half-hearted effort to find out what was missing, but he was too shocked to do much.

"The payrolls for the Antelope and Mary Ellen came in late last night from Scorpion Bend," he said. "They were wrapped separately—and both are gone. Doc, are you sure Dale's dead?"

The old doctor nodded grimly. Heffner said, "How on earth did they have time to do all this, without interruption?"

"Very simple," sighed Henry. "Everybody was interested in the unloading of that grizzly bear, down the street. They had time to carry away the building, had they desired."

They had the body removed to Bogart's place, and closed the bank, temporarily.

Henry looked a little sick about the whole thing. He had liked Dale Jensen. And there was also the matter of thousands of dollars missing from the bank. Judge said, "I wonder if this is the last entry in our book of crime, Henry. Another murder and another robbery. Where will it all end, I wonder. I—I believe we should welcome the assistance of Slim Partee—if he comes."

"Were he the dumbest detective on earth, I would take him in my arms and plant a kiss upon his alabaster brow," declared Henry. "But—and it is a big but, Judge—I am afraid that too many already know of his coming. Three men knew it—five know it now. That is just five too many for his well being. A detective is only effective while alive, Judge. Men who will deliberately murder a nice lad, like Dale Jensen, will not hesitate for one minute to murder a menace to their freedom. I wish Mr. Partee well—but I surely will keep my eyes open for desert flowers. Maricopa lilies, perhaps. Judge, if Frijole and Slim do not come soon with—"

"Ask and ye shall receive," whispered Judge, craning his neck to look through the dust-streaked window.

A team and buckboard had drawn up to the little hitch-rack, and Frijole Bill Cullison, cook at Henry's JHC ranch, and Slim Pickins, Henry's lone cowpoke, were coming in. Frijole was a little half-pint, wearing a piratical mustache, and bearing a gallon jug in his hands, held chest-high. Behind him walked Slim, tall, angular, buck-toothed; two of the best liars in the state. Slim had his old sombrero clutched in his hands, keeping step with Frijole, coming in with great dignity. It was like two slaves, bringing tribute to a king.

They came inside, said nothing, as Frijole tenderly placed the jug on the sheriff's desk. Then they both bowed low, stepped back a pace and folded their arms.

"Damned mumbo jumbo!" snorted Judge.

"Have done, Judge!" whispered Henry, his eyes on the jug. He looked soberly at Frijole and Slim, and said, "Well done."

"We think so," nodded Frijole. "Last eve it blowed the bung out of the barrel six times, hand-runnin'. That's a record. Five times is the most she ever done before. We drawed this gallon right after the sixth explosion, corked her with care and wired the cork. Oh, she did jump off the floor a couple times, before she resigned herself to fate, but she's as tame as a house-cat now."

"What devil's brew now?" queried Judge. "Potato alcohol, maguey distillation, horse-liniment and what-not, I suppose."

"What-not in that?" asked Frijole huskily. "Nossir, not that. She's as clean-cut as a diamond. Prunes from Patagonia, potatoes from Idaho, maguey, cut and soured by patient hands, a dash of nitro-glycerine and —the rest is my own secret formula, Judge. But there shore ain't no what-nots."

Frijole drew up to his full five feet four, and glared at Judge. Slim chuckled soundlessly, and tried not to show his teeth. Henry waited further discussion. Slim said, "Tell 'em what happened to Bill Shakespeare, Frijole."

"Oh, no—not that again!" exploded Judge. "Do not lie, Frijole. No one believes your stories about that blasted rooster."

"I do, Judge," said Henry soberly. "I believe every word."

"Thank yuh, Henry." Frijole hitched up his belt, and shrugged his thin shoulders. "Yuh see, there's been a awful lot of crows along the dry-wash out there, and crows is awful hard on little chickens and aigs. They even fly down and peck at Ol' Bill Shakespeare, which ain't got a feather left, except on his wings, and one little one on the back of his red neck. Ever little while they put ol' Bill under a lumberpile, and it's irkin' him somethin' awful.

"You gents know how Bill is toward

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liquor. Every time I make a batch of liquor, I hide the mash from Bill, but he mostly allus finds it. On this last batch I swore I'd fool that blasted old rooster; so I took out a loose fence-post, poured in the mash and reset the post. I done all this at night. Well, I misjudged the power of that mash, which blowed out that post and five more along with it. Next mornin' all Bill Shakespeare has t' do is foller his nose.

"Next mornin' Ol' Bill's got a crop like a sofy-piller. Well, sir, the next thing I knowed, here's Ol' Bill, a-settin' on the grind-stone, sharpenin' his spurs. I got to thinkin'—"

"You got to lying!" snorted Judge. "Sharpening his spurs, indeed!"

"Excuse the interruption, Frijole," said Henry. "Proceed."

"Well," continued Frijole, "I cain't quite figure out what Bill's got on his mind. After he's got needle-points on them long spurs, he falls off the grindstone and went wanderin' down toward the wash, gettin' weaker and weaker. All to once he falls down, rolls over on his back in the sand, kicks a couple times and goes plumb limp.

"Henry, I don't mind tellin' yuh—I cried a little. Me and Ol' Bill's been mighty close for a long time—mighty close. Well, that flock of crows, a-settin' in a dead tree, has been watchin' Bill, and they figure Bill's done passed this mortal coil. A crow is allus hongry. They hops off the tree and takes out toward Bill, which ain't moved since his last wiggle. They circle plenty. All to once a anxious crow makes the first dive at Bill. Well, sir, that crow does a hoolihan, spreads out past Bill and stays there. I don't sabe it.

"Then another makes the dive and acts likewise. I tell yuh, gents, I stands right there and saw Ol' Bill pile up twelve crows, every last one of 'em split from stem to gudgeon. They dive in close, Bill rips 'em with his spurs, and they head for crow heaven. Then Bill gets up, burps a couple, three times, and parades back to the stable. He's seen his duty and he's done her. Sober, he can't plan at all—but you let him git drunk—"

"Slim," said Judge, "did you see this happen?"

"I helped Frijole set six fence-posts," replied Slim soberly.

"Did — you — see — those — twelve — dead—crows?"

"Well, no, I didn't—exactly. You see, Frijole had 'em buried, before I got up. But it happened all right. I counted the crows along the dry wash, and there's exactly twelve missin'."

"Where-at is Oscar Johnson?" queried Frijole.

"He went to a dance at Scorpion Bend last night," replied Henry.

"Took Josephine, I reckon," grinned Slim.

"Ah, yes," sighed Henry. "Love must be wonderful."

OSCAR JOHNSON was the giant Swede jailer, and Josephine Swensen, a long, lean Swedish woman, who worked as a maid at the hotel.

"What's new in the city?" asked Frijole, after a long silence.

"For your edification," replied Henry, "the bank was robbed a short while ago, and they murdered Dale Jensen."

"No!" exploded Frijole and Slim in unison. "Dale Jensen? Why, he's a nice feller."

"They beat him to death with a gun barrel," said Judge.

"I believe we better open the jug," said Henry. "After all, it is of no value, until we do. Judge, will you get the cups?"

Judge secured the four tin-cups, Frijole carefully unwrapped the bailing-wire, which held the cork, and gingerly worked it loose, while Slim Pickins stood close behind him, hands clasped tightly at his chest. There was only a very slight *plop* as the cork came out.

"Tame as a baby angel," whispered Frijole.

He poured the four cups full of the amber liquid. For a long time Frijole had specialized in prune whiskey, but lately he had been experimenting with variations.

The cups were passed, and at a signal from Henry, each man drank his cupful. Frijole's liquor was not made to taste, nor anything resembling a sip. The sooner down, the better. They all downed their drink. The cup fell from Judge's hand, clattering to the floor. Frijole and Slim merely looked blankly into space. Henry wheezed

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painfully, patting himself on the chest with the bottom of the empty cup.

"Now," whispered Frijole, "do you believe my story of Bill Shakespeare?"

"Every word," husked Judge. "Even to the grindstone. By the beard of my great grandfather, I haven't had such a shock since I was born. What on earth is in it?"

"Lightning," said Henry weakly. "Lightning, a handful of rockets—and glowworms, Judge. Feel it?"

Judge tried to pick up the empty cup, almost fell out of his chair, and then kicked it aside with his toe.

Henry laughed heartily, clapping his rotund belly with both hands. It wasn't often that Henry laughed; he usually merely looked sober and wiped away his tears. For quite a few years Henry Harrison Conroy's name had blazoned from billboards and theater lobbies from coast to coast, a headliner in vaudeville. Henry had been born backstage, lived most of his life in the atmosphere of the theater, and knew little of anything else. In the waning days of vaudeville, Henry's uncle, owner of the JHC cattle ranch in Wild Horse Valley, died and left the ranch to Henry, who, knowing not a thing about cattle, took over the ranch, clad in tailored clothes, a pearl-colored derby, spats and a gold-headed cane. Arizona loved him. He was something new. After the legal time had elapsed to make Henry one of their own, at an election, cowboys wrote Henry's name on their ballots, and he was elected sheriff. It was done as a joke—and Henry knew it.

In Tonto City lived Judge Van Treece, who had never been a judge, but a first-class criminal lawyer, whose great thirst ran him out of the profession. A tall, lean derelict, genteel, courteous, proud, Judge met Henry. Together they slaked their thirsts. Arizona had played a joke by electing Henry; so Henry completed the joke by appointing Judge as his deputy, and making Oscar Johnson, the giant Swede, who Judge dubbed the Vitrified Viking, the jailer. Together they formed what the editor of the Scorpion Bend *Clarion* called "The Shame of Arizona."

In spite of the fact that not one of the three knew anything about conducting the office of sheriff, they had done a good job. A short, fat man, with a face like a full moon, and a nose as big and as red as a medium-sized tomato, tragic-looking man,

and a giant Swede, who looked dumbly at the world through small, faded-blue eyes made up a trio looking less like Arizona peacemakers than any other three men in the state.

OSCAR JOHNSON and Josephine Swensen came back from Scorpion Bend, tired, red-eyed and not speaking. Oscar put the horse and buggy in the livery-stable and came over to the office, where he yawned, looked sharply at the jug on Henry's desk and sat down.

"Hyah, Oscar; have a drink," invited Frijole.

"Ay don't know," replied Oscar. "Yosephine say Ay must choose between her and drink-ing."

"They both have a punch," remarked Henry. "I saw Josephine hit a traveling salesman one day, and ten minutes later he woke up on the street, reciting, 'Mary had a little lamb.' "

"What happened?" asked Judge.

"A loose-yawed Norwegian, named Nelse Bjornsted."

"I didn't know that Norwegians happened," said Slim, but Oscar ignored it as he said wearily:

"Ay got sore feet and Ay went to get a drink, and ven Ay coom back, Yosephine is dancing vit de Norvegian. Das is oll right;

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Ay am villing to share my punishment vit others. But Yosephine don't need to make so many extra viggles. Everybody laugh. Ay stop de dance. I say to her, 'You come vit me to de dance, and if you want to viggle, Ay vill viggle you, because Ay don't vant you to viggle vit Norvegians.' She say to me, 'You dronken Svede, Ay vill viggle vit whoever vants to.' And she take a sving at my yaw."

Oscar chuckled at the memory of that swing. Slim said, "You ain't marked up none, Oscar."

"Ay ducked," he chuckled, "Bjorsted didn't."

"What happened?" asked Henry, wiping away a tear.

"He go kerplunk," grinned Oscar. "He got his face too close."

"Nosey, huh?" remarked Frijole.

"Ay don't t'ink so," grinned Oscar. "Das poor Norvegian is so deaf he don't know vat ve are saying. He vake up and he say he is t'rough vit wimmin. Yosephine blame me. She don't t'ink Ay ducked. She say Ay wars too dronk to duck—Ay vars falling down."

"You better quit drinking," advised Henry, wiping his eyes.

"Next veek Ay vill take oop de matter," said Oscar. "Ay am not de man to yump into t'ings."

"Fill up the cups, Judge," said Henry.

"I'm afraid we shall need new cups," said Judge. "I believe the bottoms fell out just before the Vitrified Viking came back."

Tom Lorenz, the gambler, came up to the doorway. Lorenz was a tall, dark person, hard-eyed, cold-jawed. Right now he looked very tired. Henry walked to the doorway, and Lorenz looked at him.

"You were looking for me, sir?" asked Henry.

Lorenz nodded slowly, and stuck out his hand. "I just wanted to shake your hand and say thank you, Conroy."

"Oh, it wasn't anything, Lorenz," said Henry.

"It was all I have," said Lorenz. "Her mother died—up North."

"I'm sorry," said Henry. "Forget it, Lorenz—you'd do the same for me, I'm sure."

Lorenz's smile was rather ghastly, Henry thought—as though someone goaded him into that smile. He said quietly, "I hope so, Sheriff," and walked away.

NEXT day came Slim Partee, the man selected by the commissioners to work out their crime troubles. Ed Parker met Partee as soon as he rode into Tonto City, and brought him over to Henry's office, where Judge and Henry were discussing the murder of Dale Jensen. Partee was of medium height, lean and wiry, with a touch of gray in his hair, eyes the color of blue ice, and a hard mouth. Henry's reaction was that Partee was, as they say, plenty salty. He merely grunted over the introduction as Parker said, "This is the man we selected, Sheriff."

"Yes, I remember," said Henry soberly. "From Montana, you said, I believe."

Parker nodded, and Henry said, "I wonder if you would remember Jim Crowley, the sheriff at Great Falls, Partee."

Partee nodded shortly. "I knowed him well," he replied.

"A good man," said Henry. "I wish you luck down here, sir."

"Thank yuh," said Partee, and they went away.

Judge squinted at Henry thoughtfully, as he said, "Where on earth did you ever meet a Jim Crowley, from Great Falls?"

"Me?" asked Henry innocently. "I never said I did, Judge."

"You've merely heard about him?"

"No, I never even heard of him. Coincidence, isn't it? Or perhaps I am clairvoyant. I merely picked the name out of the air."

"Could it be that Mr. Partee is a liar, Henry?"

"Possibly, Judge. However, lying isn't any crime."

"That man," declared Judge, "is an impostor. Detective!"

"Even a detective might lie, Judge. Let us give him a chance. If he can run that murdering gang to earth, I'll believe anything he tells me."

For two days things went along quietly. The inquest over the body of Dale Jensen brought out no evidence not already known. Slim Partee did not come back to Tonto City during that time, and Henry had no idea

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what he was doing. He saw Jim Bailey and spoke about Partee. Bailey was sure that Partee would be a big help in catching the gang. All they wanted was for Henry to let Partee go ahead and handle it in his own way.

It was the night of the third day after Partee arrived, and about midnight. Henry and Judge occupied the same room at the Tonto Hotel, and were fast asleep, when a knock on the door aroused them. Henry got up, clad in his baggy underwear and went to the door.

In the dim light from an overhead oil lamp he recognized Tom Lorenz, the gambler, clad in black, a hat pulled low over his eyes. He said, "Sorry to wake you up, Conroy."

"That is perfectly all right, Lorenz," said Henry sleepily. "Come in, won't you?"

Lorenz pulled the door partly shut behind him, his left hand on the knob. He said, "Thank you, but I haven't time. Me and Lucky are pulling out. She's downstairs in a buggy. I wanted you to know how much I appreciate what you did—saving her for me. I can't tell you much—I'm under the gun, if you know what I mean." He lowered his voice, as he continued, "My life isn't worth a penny, unless I get out of here. I can tell you this much, Sheriff—my job was to kill you, if you got too smart to things. But after what you did for me, I couldn't do it. Another thing—"

Two shots, almost blending into one report, smashed out in the hallway behind Tom Lorenz, the bullets tearing the life out of the gambler, who jerked from the impact, turned half-around, still clinging to the doorknob.

Then he fell against the door, flinging it open, and went flat on his face, his feet still inside the room.

Henry heard footsteps running down the hallway toward the back stairs. Judge was sitting up in bed, hair on end, wide-eyed, as he stared at the open doorway, the two boot-soles pointed toward him. Henry leaned back against a table, rubbing his red nose, trying to remember just what to do. The hotel-keeper came up the stairs, ran down to the doorway, saw the dead man, whirled and yelled, "I'll get the sheriff!" and went pounding down the stairs.

"He'll get the sheriff," said Judge. "Yes, I believe that would be a good idea. Henry! Henry, we've got another murder!"

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. "So we have! Well, I suppose we better get dressed."

MEN came running up the stairs, crowding around the doorway. Henry and Judge managed to get their pants and boots on before the rush. Henry ordered a man to find Dr. Bogart. The hotel-keeper tried to explain what he knew, but Henry cut him short.

"Downstairs, you'll find Lorenz's little girl in a buggy. Get her and have your wife look after her tonight."

"What on earth happened, Henry?" asked Henry Pierce, owner of the general store, who had been in a poker game at the King's Castle. Henry told them that Lorenz had come to the door, was admitted, and said he was leaving town, with his daughter. Henry said, "All the man wanted to do was to thank me again and tell us good-by—and two guns blasted him through the partly opened door."

After the excitement had died down, the body removed, John Campbell, the big prosecuting attorney, Henry Pierce, who was chairman of the commissioners, and Al Crews, proprietor of the King's Castle Saloon, came with Henry and Judge to the office.

Henry told them, almost word for word, just what Lorenz had said.

"These men," declared Henry, "are an organized gang, with brains. Lorenz had a spark of decency—and they murdered him."

"He said he was hired to kill you?" queried Pierce.

"He said it was his job—if I got too smart."

"By that," remarked Campbell, "he meant that if you got a clue to the criminals, I suppose. By the way, the little girl was asleep in the buggy, Henry. The hotel-keeper's wife has her."

"Good!" exclaimed Henry. "Thank you, John."

"Don't worry about the kid," said Pierce bruskly. "We'll see that she's well taken care of, Henry."

"Lorenz must have been frightened," said Crews. "He never told me he was

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going to quit. In fact, I owe him a week's pay, which he didn't collect."

"What do you know about Lorenz?" asked Henry curiously.

"Not very much," admitted Crews. "He was a good man. He spoke of being from the North—Idaho, Montana, Dakota—nothin' specific. Gamblers are notorious drifters, Henry. I liked Lorenz."

"I shouldn't say it," remarked Henry, "but I rather liked him, too."

"Even after he confessed that he was here to kill you?" asked Pierce.

"Yes," nodded Henry. "It was his job. Unpleasant and messy, I suppose, but necessary, from their viewpoint. I am very glad that they didn't consider me very smart. Sometimes, I find, it pays to be dumb."

John Campbell shook his head grimly. "This thing is going too far, gentlemen. I have no ideas on what to do—but something must be done."

"If they would only quit murdering people and give us time to catch our breath," complained Judge. "It is disconcerting."

"A report from the bank," said Campbell, "indicates that they got about twenty-two thousand in that robbery. Since that gang started to operate, they have cleaned up approximately ninety thousand dollars, and murdered two men. Gentlemen, it must stop."

"And," added Henry, "I am afraid the end is not yet in sight. They are making money—and the law is far behind them—yet."

Henry and Judge went back to their room and went to bed. Judge sighed, "Henry, when it comes to brains, I'm afraid we cannot compete with them."

"Do not be too sure, Judge. They have every ace in the deck, and all we have is small, unmated cards. They know who we are—we do not know who they are. But sooner or later, one of them will make a mistake."

"Thank you, Mr. Holmes—and good-night to you, sir," said Judge.

SLIM PARTEE came to Tonto City next day. Henry was down at Dr. Bogart's place when Slim Partee arrived there, dismounted and knocked on the door. The doctor admitted him when he said he wanted to take a look at the dead man. Partee looked sharply at Henry, nodded shortly and stood back, as the doctor uncovered the body of Lorenz. Then he came closer, looking at the face of the deceased gambler. Henry watched him closely, and he saw Partee's eyes narrow, his hands clench tightly for a moment. He drew a deep breath and stepped back.

"Thanks," he said quietly, then turned to Henry and said, "Mind tellin' me how this happened?"

Henry told him exactly what had taken place at the hotel, watching Partee's face closely, as he recounted the murder.

"Two men shot him through a half-opened door, eh?" Partee said.

"Yes," replied Henry. "You see, this man was grateful to me, Mr. Partee."

"I heard about the grizzly," said Partee.

"As a matter of fact," said Henry, "this man confessed that his job was to kill me, but after what happened he didn't feel quite up to it. Two guns killed him instantly, as he talked to me."

"What became of the kid?" asked Partee.

"The hotel-keeper's wife has her at present. He called her Lucky."

"Lucky, eh?" muttered Partee. "Thank yuh, Sheriff. *Hasta luego.*"

"*Hasta la vista,*" replied Henry as Partee walked out.

AFTER Partee rode away, Dr. Bogart said, "Who is this man, Henry?"

"I am not at liberty to say, Doc," replied Henry. "I have not been sworn to secrecy, but in the event that this man is found, with his hide full of lead, I do not want anyone to say, 'Conroy told me who he was.' "

"I see," nodded the doctor.

"Thank you, Doctor. By the way, you watched him, too, as he looked at Lorenz. Did it strike you that he might have known Lorenz?"

"It did, Henry. He tried to mask it, but failed. Yes, I would say that he knew Lorenz. Is that information of any value to you?"

"Not exactly, Doc—it merely would indicate that these two men have known each other. On what basis, who knows? Well, I must go back to the office; I am expecting a telegram."

Henry walked back to the office. Judge was there, talking with Oscar Johnson. The

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telegram was on Henry's desk, and he read it quickly:

NO MAN NAMED CROWLEY EVER SHERIFF HERE. ALSO HAVE NEVER HEARD OF MAN NAME SLIM PARTEE. NO RECORD OF HIS WORK ON ANY CASE IN THIS STATE.

Henry put the telegram in his pocket and sat down at his desk. Oscar wandered outside, and Henry handed the telegram to Judge.

Judge said quietly, "I wonder what name Partee had in Montana."

"Mr. Partee," remarked Henry, "came to view the remains of Tom Lorenz, and his physical reactions upon viewing the body indicated, in my opinion, that Mr. Partee had known Mr. Lorenz. I made a point of watching his face and his hands—and they both showed a distinct reaction."

"Henry," said Judge soberly, "you seem to be getting rather scientific in your analysis of human emotions. I must confess that I have never noticed it before."

"Ah, yes," assured Henry blandly. "However, I must be careful regarding any exhibition of intelligence. Hm-m-m-m-m! Lorenz was from the North, and Partee—Hm-m-m-m."

"For heaven's sake, Henry—do not become a humming sheriff! It ill becomes you to wear an alabaster brow, creased with lines of concentration. Relax my friend; you are as tense as a fiddle-string."

"Wouldst do me a favor, sirrah?" queried Henry.

"Wouldst gladly, if it were in my power. Speak, man!"

"Fetch two cups and the jug—nay, three—here comes Oscar."

Judge hesitated, as Oscar came in. Henry said, "Oscar, we are about to imbibe from the jug. Shall it be two cups—or three?"

"Ay have yust talked vit Yosephine," said Oscar quietly. "Make it t'ree cups, Yudge—Ay am no yentleman."

JAMES WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW PELLY, editor of the Scorpion Bend *Clarion*, came to Tonto City that afternoon. Pelly was small, wizened, nearsighted and definitely intoxicated with his own importance. He had always disliked Henry and Judge, but his special obsession was Oscar Johnson. Pelly was afraid of the big Swede.

However, Pelly was not without nerve, and came down to the office. Judge took one look at him and quoted, "Now is the winter of our discontent." Henry said, "Greetings, scribe—glad to see you."

"Thank you—even if I can't believe it," said Pelly, his eyes on Oscar, who chuckled quietly and flexed his huge fingers.

"Sit down, Mr. Pelly," invited Henry. "Make the office your headquarters while in the city. Is this a vacation, or are you seeking a story?"

"I have," declared Pelly quietly, "had a conference with the three commissioners, regarding what has happened recently, and I don't mind telling you, Mr. Conroy, that the only reason they are retaining you in office is because no one else wants the job."

"Interesting," murmured Henry quietly. "I did not realize this, my friend. Tell us more, please."

"Well, the mine owners have appealed to the commissioners. Do you realize," Pelly pointed a finger at Henry, "that this crime wave has cost the mines nearly ninety thousand dollars—and nothing is being done to recover that money or to prevent further theft?"

"You mean to say that nothing is being done?" queried Judge. "Why, that is damnable, Mr. Pelly. No wonder they protest. If I owned one of those mines—"

"Did the commissioners say that nothing is being done?" asked Henry.

Pelly shrugged. "That fact is self-evident," he said.

"I suppose," remarked Judge, "that this office will be the target of your editorial pen—as usual."

"No," replied Pelly. "Damn it, Van Treece, I have flayed all of you for a long time; burned your skins with every invective possible, short of downright vulgarity or profanity—and what good has it done me? Through some lucky turn of events, you manage to—well, make me look very bad, indeed. Should this turn out to be another such deals, I do not care to be haunted by the ghosts of my own editorials. As a matter of fact, I should like to congratulate you, Mr. Conroy, on your cold nerve, or damnable ignorance, in the grizzly episode."

"Thank you, sir," murmured Henry.

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"You may, of course, form your own opinion. And it warms the cockles of my heart to know that, for once, the *Clarion* is on our side of the fence."

"It definitely is not!" snapped Pelly. "The *Clarion* is neutral in this case. We shall publish the facts."

"That is all we ask," nodded Henry.

"So the commissioners intimated that no one else wants the job, did they?" asked Judge.

Pelly nodded. "Yes, they did."

"Who would?" smiled Henry. "It isn't too pleasant—and it definitely is dangerous. Stubborn ignorance is all that keeps me here."

"May I quote you on that?" asked Pelly.

"Certainly, you may. It is a fact."

Pelly made a few mental notes. Judge said, "You better put it on paper, Pelly. Even an insulting remark might escape your alleged mind."

"Have done, Judge!" chided Henry. "The man comes in friendship."

"I do not," denied Pelly. "I merely want to be fair."

"Stalemate," grunted Judge.

Henry leaned back in his chair and pursed his lips. "You may inform my public," he said slowly, "that certain clues have developed which will definitely lay the miscreants by the heels in a very short time."

"Do you expect me to believe that?" asked Pelly.

"No. In fact, I hardly believe it myself, Mr. Pelly. I fear that this position of mine has made me a confirmed skeptic. Judge, if you are not too busy—will you get the cups and the jug?"

JAMES WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW PELLY did not even wait long enough to say good-bye, but was out of there like a shot. He had no appreciation of Frijole's distillations, having been obliged to imbibe of them several times. Oscar Johnson chuckled merrily.

"Ay vould, like to bring him back Henry," he said.

"Leave him alone," ordered Henry. "At least, the man met us with the semblance of an olive branch."

"A close inspection would prove it to be poison-oak," grunted Judge. "I have no faith in the scoundrel, Henry. Ghosts of his own editorials! End to end they would reach to Nome, Alaska. Grisly word-shapes to mock his sleepless nights."

"Ay don't like that yigger," declared Oscar blandly.

"A diplomatic statement of hate," said Henry. "Judge, I wish we knew exactly what Mr. Partee is doing, or intends doing. I fairly itch to throw my forces into the battle."

"Try scratching," suggested Judge, and went to secure the jug.

About an hour later with only Henry in the office, Al Crews, manager of the King's Castle Saloon, came to the office. He said, "There were a few of Tom Lorenz's belongings in one of the rooms, and I found this old envelope, containing a kodak picture."

The envelope was addressed to Tom Lorimer, Miles City, Montana, and the small, faded picture was of two men and horses, standing near a corral fence. The faces were too small for identification. Henry studied the picture for a while, and looked again at the envelope.

"It would seem," he remarked, "that Tom Lorenz may have been known as Lorimer. As Shakespeare said, 'What's in a name?' "

"That's true, Sheriff. I thought you might like to see this."

"May I keep the picture?" asked Henry.

"Keep the envelope, too," said Crews. "It ain't worth anythin'."

Henry wasn't too sure about that. He took the picture and walked up to an assay office, where he borrowed the use of a powerful microscope. It enlarged the picture many times, bringing out the faces clearly enough for identification. Henry went back to the office and sat down at his desk. The two men in the picture were Henry Pierce and Slim Partee. Henry put the picture away, and was sitting there, wondering what could be done about the crime situation, when Pierce and Jim Bailey came in. Bailey said, "We have arranged with Mrs. Doran to take care of the little Lorenz girl, Henry."

"I am glad, gentlemen," said Henry. "I wonder if Lorenz has any relatives, who might be interested."

"He left no records of any kind," replied Pierce. "We don't even know where he came from."

"Any report from Partee?" asked Henry.

"Not yet," replied Pierce. "I suppose it

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will take him some time to become familiar with things."

"Did you know Partee, before he came here?" asked Henry.

Pierce shook his head. "All we know," he replied, "is his reputation, which is very good. I sure hope he can help us out."

"I'm sure he will," said Henry. "At least, he can't very well make the situation worse. Were Partee and Lorenz acquainted?"

"Acquainted?" parroted Bailey. "No, I—well, of course, I can't be sure—but I don't believe they were. Why?"

"Partee wanted to see the body."

"Oh, I suppose that was because—I mean, after all, he is handling things for us, Sheriff. He'd naturally want to see the victim. At least, I should think he would, wouldn't you, Pierce?"

"Naturally," nodded Pierce.

"I suppose he would," agreed Henry. "Well, if I run across anything which might prove of value to Partee, I shall pass it along."

"I wish you would, Henry," said Bailey. "He'll need every help possible. You realize what he is up against, of course."

"Yes, I believe I have a faint idea," grunted Henry.

HENRY wanted to be sure of his identification; so he took Judge up to the assay office and used the microscope again. Judge looked at the picture for a long time, nodded shortly and they went out.

"No question that it is Henry Pierce," he declared.

"Proving," sighed Henry, "that at least one of our estimable commissioners is a liar. He says he didn't know Partee. We have partly established that Tom Lorenz was formerly Tom Larimer, that Partee knew Lorenz and was disturbed by his death, and also that Pierce and Partee knew each other, before Partee came here."

"And just of what use is this information?" asked Judge dryly.

"None—in itself, but it is part of a neat web, which I hope to spin. Mark you, I hope to spin."

"Good luck in your spinning, my friend," said Judge quietly, "but beware the web you spin. Remember—Lorenz was here to kill you, if you became too intelligent. A word to the wise—you know."

Henry nodded soberly, his eyes thoughtful.

"Fate is a queer thing, Judge," he said. "Tony Vasquez caught a grizzly, and Ed Parker bought it. The grizzly escaped, and I, fortunately, am presumed to have frightened the grizzly away from a little girl, whose father was hired to murder me. Any break in that chain—exit Henry Harrison Conroy. I would probably be dead, Lorenz alive, the grizzly in a zoo. As I say, fate weaves queer webs. The two victims, myself and the grizzly, won out in the deal."

"The moving finger writes," quoted Judge. "Omar knew."

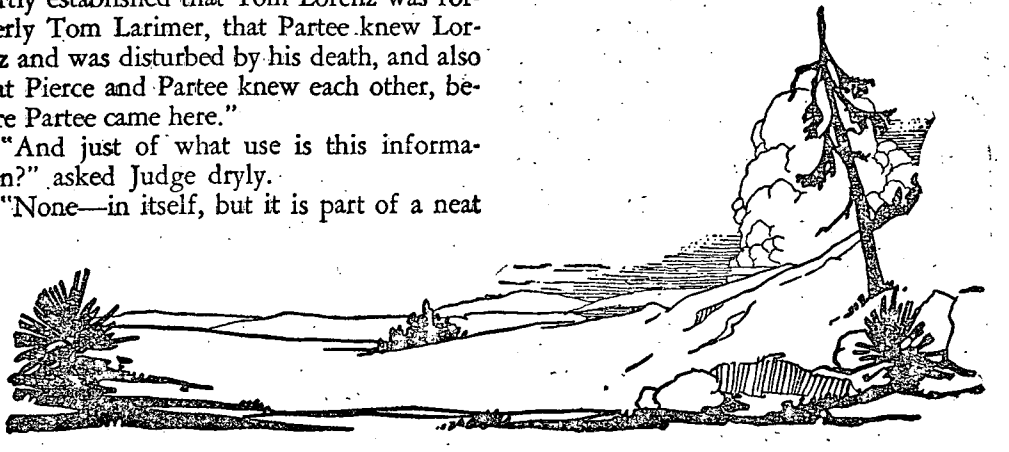
"And he had a thirst," added Henry. "Is there anything left in the jug?"

"Enough for two, Henry. I would suggest that we spend the night at the ranch, and replenish our stock. After all, we know not our destiny, and we may as well make merry."

"True," sighed Henry. "Omar was right when he wrote, 'For in and out, above, below, 'tis nothing but a Magic Shadow-show, play'd in a Box whose candle is the sun, round which we Phantom Figures come and go.'"

Henry sat up in his chair and laughed quietly.

"A couple of doddering old fools, quoting poetry. The cups, sir—we must break the spell."



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THEY rode out to the JHC, where Frijole was starting to cook a mulligan. Slim was flat on his back on the front porch, his heels high against the railing, sound asleep, when they rode in. He awoke, never changed position, and yelled to Frijole, "Load the pot, Frijole! Here comes the Shame of Arizony!"

"A Wild Horse Valley fanfare!" snorted Judge. "A fine way to announce our arrival, I must say!"

They sat down on the shaded porch, and Frijole brought out the jug and cups. He said, "It'll take a couple hours before that mulligan is done—but she'll be awful good."

Frijole took a drink, sat down on the steps and chuckled. Slim said, "Outside of that drink, what's eatin' yuh?"

"I was thinkin' about that Lazy L crew," replied Frijole."

"Ed Parker's three men?" queried Henry.

"Yeah," grinned the little cook. "Powers, Rush and Hill. Come a-ridin' in and partakes of our good cheer, and then gets sarcastic about the sheriff's office. I shore told 'em a few things, Henry. Powers said you couldn't find a black elephant in a flock of blackbirds, and I said, 'All right, you short-sports, money talks. Would any of you *pelicanos* like to bet twenty dollars against twenty that Henry don't bust up that gang within a week from t'day?' "

"Well, sir, I had 'em where the hair was short. They hemmed and hawed around, had another drink, and then Clete Hill says, 'If yo're so sure about this, how about givin' us some odds?' I says, 'Well, I'll tell yuh what I'll do—I'll bet twenty against ten.' "

"And they didn't take it," declared Slim. "Maybe I scared 'em off, when I said I'd make 'em the same bet."

"And then," declared Frijole, "they asked questions, but didn't get any answers. I jist told 'em to put up their money, and we'd ride it out, but that I wouldn't tell 'em anythin' further."

"They're a awful salty gang—but there ain't a gut in the bunch," declared Slim. "But we've shore got 'em fightin' their hats."

"Got me fighting mine, too," said Henry soberly. "Frijole, do you not realize the danger to me? No, you probably do not. Lorenz was to murder me, whenever I exhibited any brains whatever. That is, if I—pass the jug, will you, Judge. What's said is said."

"And those three roadrunners will spread the news," sighed Judge. "They will say that the odds are twenty-to-ten that Henry cleans out this gang by this time next week."

Henry filled his cup and laughed shortly. "One short week," he said, "and they will try and make it a short one. Well, no man does, until his time comes. We drink to the gods of luck—may they never turn their face away."

Frijole's mulligan was a great success, and they all ate heavily. In fact, Henry ate too well. Perhaps the mixture of mulligan and what Slim called Panther Paint did not mingle too well. Judge went to bed, but Henry felt too miserable to lie down. Long after the others had gone to bed, Henry wandered around outside. He sat down on some old lumber beside the stable to meditate over the sins of over-indulgence. It was very dark in the shadow of the old stable. Henry decided to go back to the house, and started to get off the lumber, when he thought he heard voices.

Taking a cautious look, he saw two riders, dismounting near the stable. It was too dark for him to more than see that it was two riders. Henry sank back in the heavy shadows and listened. The men came through the fence not over thirty feet from Henry. There was not a light showing in the ranch-house. The men stopped just inside the fence, and one of them could be heard to say quietly:

"I tell yuh they sleep in a back room."

HENRY heard this very distinctly, but the reply was not audible. However, the first voice said, "No, I tell yuh they always sleep in the back room. No use shootin' the front."

Henry said, "You are both wrong, gentlemen."

The effect was electrical. The words were hardly out of Henry's mouth, before two bullets smashed into the stable wall over his head. Then the two men were going through the fence. Henry ran forward two or three steps, his big forty-five gripped in both hands. The two men were almost clear of the fence, when Henry fired. He had no real target as he pulled the trigger, and it

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seemed as though the whole world exploded.

Henry was knocked backwards and went down on the seat of his pants, blinded, shocked. Dust and gravel came down like rain. Doors were banging at the ranchhouse. Henry was dimly conscious of voices yelling at him—calling his name. Then they came running—Judge and Slim. A moment later here came Frijole, trying to light a lantern even as he ran.

"Henry!" yelled Judge. "Henry, where are you?"

"I am here," replied Henry quietly. "What happened?"

"Something exploded!" panted Judge. "It broke windows—"

Henry got unsteadily to his feet. He said, "I believe something did explode. My, my!"

"I heard shots, too!" exclaimed Slim. "Somebody shootin'."

He stubbed his toe on Henry's gun, swore fervently, and picked it up. Henry said, "I—I believe I lost it, Slim."

"Well, what happened?" demanded Judge. He looked like an old crane, standing there in his long underwear. Henry laughed, and Judge said it was no time to laugh. Frijole found where the explosion had occurred. There was a hole about a foot deep and three feet across, where the hard ground had been blown away. Judge says, "Henry, surely there is an answer to this puzzle."

"I saw two men," said Henry. "They came through the fence, and it seems they were undecided where we were sleeping. One man evidently favored the back of the house. However, I ended the dispute by saying that they were both wrong. Really, it doesn't pay to take part in arguments, Judge. They shot at me. I shot back—and the next moment I was sitting down with no effort of my part."

"Good heavens!" husked Judge. "They—Henry, they were going to dynamite us! Don't you realize their intentions?"

"I am trying not to, Judge; but I am afraid it is no use."

They searched across the fence, but the two men were gone. Back in the house, they sat down in the main room. Judge was still jittery, but Henry didn't seem too concerned. He said, "Luck is with us, Judge. First, a grizzly saved me, and now indigestion blocks a dynamiting."

"Have yuh still got it?" asked Frijole.

Henry shook his head quickly. "I recommend dynamite," he said. "It really worked wonders."

"Do you think they will come back?" asked Judge nervously.

"No," replied Henry, "I do not believe they will. They were almost as close to that blast as I was—and I can assure you, I would not come back."

"Might as well hit the hay," said Slim. "Yuh know, I was scared for a minute that it was a keg of Frijole's liquor."

HENRY and Judge rode back to Tonto City next morning, after another search of the area beyond the fence. Their conclusions were that the two men had a home-made bomb, which they dropped when Henry called to them, and that Henry's bullet had exploded it.

As Henry unlocked the office door they saw an envelope on the floor. It was addressed to the sheriff, and the one sheet of smudgy paper, written in penciled capitals, said:

WE WILL GIVE YOU 24 HOURS TO RESIGN AND GET OUT OF THE VALLEY.

It was unsigned. Henry and Judge sat down, looking at each other.

"My God!" gasped Judge. "Don't you realize—or do you?"

"Being still partially intelligent—yes, Judge. Last night they were going to kill us without any warning—today they give me twenty-four hours. Inconsistent, I would say."

Judge went over to the doorway, staring out at the dusty street. Riders, drivers, men walking on the street—any of them could be the men who wrote that note. He came back and leaned on the desk, looking at Henry.

"What are you going to do?" he asked hoarsely. "After all, life is—"

"Yes—isn't it?" replied Henry. "Still, I have twenty-four hours left, Judge—twenty-four hours to force them to come out into the open—but how? How can I—hm-m-m—I wonder."

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Before Judge could ask Henry what he had on his mind, John Campbell, the prosecuting attorney, came in. Henry showed him the note, and also told him what happened at the PHC last night. Campbell sat down, looking grimly at the two men.

"It is serious, John," said Judge.

"It certainly is, Judge. What's to be done?"

"Henry will have to resign," pronounced Judge.

"Henry will not!" declared Henry warmly. "John, I wonder if the three commissioners are in town today."

"I believe they are holding a meeting this morning, Henry. I saw Pierce and Powers going into the courthouse as I came away."

The three men were in the hallway, when Henry, Judge and the lawyer came in, and they all went to Campbell's office, where they told the commissioners about the dynamiting at the JHC, and showed them the note.

"Of all the damnable things!" exploded Parker. "This is bad. What can be done to stop them?"

No one had an answer to that one. Pierce said, "Henry, you haven't any other course. Of course, you will resign."

"Of course, I shall not!" declared Henry.

"Might be the best thing to do," muttered Bailey. "After all—"

"Gentlemen," stated Henry quietly, "I am not a coward. I believe it is a colossal bluff. However, if they do, John, I want you to handle it for me. I have written a letter and left it with a certain man. In case—I am not here, John—that letter will be handed to you. In it is an outline of my findings in this case."

"If you have any evidence, Henry—" said the lawyer quickly.

"I have—but I want to be sure. I am expecting a telegram, which, as they say, will probably cinch the case. Judge will give you that telegram, John. It will be from Montana."

No one said anything. Henry got to his feet and walked over to the door of the office, where he turned and said quietly:

"A Conroy never runs away, gentlemen," and opened the door.

Judge got to his feet, went quietly over to the doorway and followed Henry, who went straight to the office. Judge was a minute behind him, and he found Henry at his desk, his eyes filled with tears.

"That," declared Henry huskily, "was the best bit of acting I have ever done, Judge. I thought my exit was a masterpiece."

"It fooled me," admitted Judge, "even if I knew you lied about the letter and telegram. For heaven's sake, why act and lie?"

HENRY blinked away some tears and shook his head. "I do not know exactly why—but it was fun. The expression on their faces! And to think that such talent is to be snuffed out by the bullet of an assassin! Ah, the shame of it—the loss to the world—and to me."

"Especially you," nodded Judge. "But what is to be done? After all, you can't sit here idly, waiting for the bullet."

"I might resign," mused Henry. "That would make you sheriff, Judge. Naturally, you would know all about the evidence I have—"

"Stop right there, sir!" exploded Judge. "Never! I do not want to be the sheriff. I refuse, pointblank. When you resign, I resign."

"Loyalty or fright, Judge?"

"Fright," admitted Judge soberly. "I have only one skin—and I never hankered to be a rug. But what on earth are we going to do? Twenty-four hours is a mighty short time, Henry."

Henry shook his head and looked out the window.

"They are burying Tom Lorenz this afternoon," he said.

"Even a funeral will be a diversion," sighed Judge.

There was not a big crowd at the cemetery, being mostly employees of the King's Castle Saloon, and a few of the curious. Mrs. Doran, wife of the hotel-keeper was there, with the little girl, still wearing her red dress, too young to realize the significance of the ceremony. Henry looked around and was surprised to see Slim Partee, standing far back from the others, listening, watching, standing hatless in the broiling sun. He rode away at the close of the ceremony. Mrs. Doran brought Lucky over to Henry, and he picked her up. She was a pretty little thing, able to say only a few words.

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"Mr. Conroy," said Mrs. Doran, "this morning we found an envelope under our door, and in it was a hundred dollars in bills. There was a few words on a piece of paper and all it—wait a moment! I have the paper."

SHE gave it to Henry, who read the penciled scrawl. It said: "Use this to help the kid."

It was unsigned, undated, but it was written on exactly the same kind of paper as the note Henry had received. He asked Mrs. Doran if he might keep the note, and she said she had no use for it. Henry patted the little girl on the head, and went back to the office with Judge, where they compared the paper. They were identical, torn from a cheap tablet.

"But what good will it do us?" asked Judge. "We do not know the writer of either note."

"I'm not so sure," replied Henry. "Partee knew Lorenz. Partee was at the funeral. Could it be that Partee left that money for the little girl? Who else, Judge?"

"But Partee is supposed to be a detective, Henry."

"You used the correct word—supposed. Judge, that man is a cold-blooded gunman—every inch of him."

"But surely, the commissioners—"

"Just pause and remember that picture, Judge."

"Yes, that is true—Henry Pierce must have known him before. But when does that twenty-four hours expire? Was it from the time we came back, or from the time the note was left under our door? That is the question. If the latter, our time runs out this evening."

"It gives me a queer feeling—waiting for the curtain to be rung down, Judge," said Henry wistfully. "There is no use dodging the issue. But, somehow, I feel that our luck has not run out. If I were slated to die by an assassin's hand, why did that grizzly come into the picture; and why did I have indigestion and break up those dynamiters? No, my friend, I feel that I am slated for a better fate."

"Kismet," pronounced Judge quietly. "Would'st imbibe?"

"Would'st," nodded Henry. "Fetch the cups, my old friend."

"I like it all except the 'old'," said Judge.

Evening came, and Tonto City seemed unusually quiet. Henry said:

"Judge, I have a feeling that we are being watched."

Judge squirmed in his chair uneasily. "Goose-pimples are such damnable things," he said. "Why mention being watched?"

"We are," said Henry quietly, "going to saddle our horses, ride out toward the ranch, swing back here carefully, stable the horses and go to the hotel by the back way."

"I see what you mean, Henry—and the idea is very good."

They saddled the horses in their small stable, rode out to the main street, turned to the left and headed out of town, traveling slowly, as they usually did. Some distance away from town, they swung back, coming in carefully behind the main street, stabling their horses in the dark, and going to the hotel, without being seen. Once in their room, they blocked the door, undressed in the dark and went to bed.

"At least," remarked Henry, "it will be a delayed execution."

IT WAS about nine o'clock, over at the King's Castle, with all the games running full-blast, when a man came into the saloon, coatless, hatless, panting, as though he had run a long ways.

"Where's the sheriff?" he gasped.

"What's the matter, Gib?" asked Al Crews, the saloon-keeper, who was at the bar, drinking with Ed Parker.

"They got John Campbell!" blurted Gibson.

John Campbell, prosecutor, a bachelor, lived with the Gibson family. A man said, "Got Campbell? What do yuh mean, Gib?"

"At suppertime," panted Gibson, "two masked men came into the kitchen. They tied me and my wife to chairs, and took Campbell. I just got loose—and I can't find the sheriff."

The place was in an uproar. Campbell was a man well liked in Wild Horse Valley. Everybody wanted to know why—but no man could answer. Crews said, "Gib, didn't they say why they wanted Campbell?"

"They didn't say a word about it. They just said that if we didn't stay hitched for an hour, they'd come back and kill us."

"Henry and Judge have gone out to

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Henry's ranch," said a man. "I saw 'em go out of town."

"Must be holding a meeting out there," said the bartender. "Jim Bailey and Henry Pierce were here a while ago, and they talked about goin' out there."

Ed Parker said, "You say that Pierce and Bailey went out to the JHC?"

"That's right," nodded the bartender. "At least, they said they were goin' out there. Somebody better go out and tell the sheriff about Campbell."

"Why?" asked a cowboy, and laughed.

"After all," said Parker, "it's his job; he's the sheriff."

"I'll go," volunteered a cowboy, and ran outside.

Al Crews said to Parker, "That's a queer deal, Ed. Why on earth would anyone kidnap John Campbell?"

Ed Parker looked grimly at his glass of liquor, as he replied:

"Who knows, Al? Campbell is a good man—it'd be bad to lose him."

Crews shook his head. "Somethin' has to be done, Ed. This gang is gettin' a stranglehold on Wild Horse Valley. They're plumb bad."

"They certainly are," agreed Parker.

OUT at the JHC, the supper dishes cleaned up, Oscar, Frijole and Slim were playing the inevitable game of seven-up on the kitchen table. The windows were all covered, the doors barred, and there were two loaded six-shooters on the table.

The three men were not too intent on their game to listen to every sound. Finally, Slim shoved his cards aside and leaned back in his chair, saying, "Yuh can't play with yore minds off the cards. Frijole, you've reneged twice in two plays. What are yuh tryin' to do with that ten-spot—eat it?"

"I feel like I had ants in m' pants," admitted Frijole. "'Course, nothin' ain't goin' to happen—but I can't believe it."

Oscar laughed gustily. "Ay am not 'fraid from no-t'ing," he said. "Yust let 'em come. Ay vould velcome 'em, Ay can tell you. Ay don't need guns. Yust let me get my hands on 'em—Ay will tie 'em in hord knots."

"Tough Swede, huh?" grinned Slim.

"My grandfadder vars a Wiking," declared Oscar.

"I know," nodded Frijole. "They had horns like a cow. How'd they ever break themselves of that habit."

"Ay don't know," confessed Oscar.

"Them old Vikin's was plenty forked," said Frijole. "They not only growed horns on their heads, but they drank from horns. I'll bet that every time a Vikin' died, they sawed off his horns and hung 'em up in the kitchen."

"Yah," grinned Oscar, "Ay bat you. Dey vars men. Ay am proud."

"Wasn't there a race of half-men, half horse?" asked Slim.

"And flyin' horses," added Frijole. "I'd shore like to have me one of them flyin' broncs. Yuh know what I'd do?"

There was no reply, because at that moment the echo of a fusillade of shots, rattled against the walls of the house, and all three men hit the floor. Frijole reached up, knocked the chimney off the lamp, and blew out the lighted wick. Slim swore hollowly in the darkness. That hot chimney had landed in his lap.

"Are we bein' attacked?" whispered Frijole.

"Sounded like a couple shotguns," whispered Slim. "I wonder what went on out there. What do you think, Oscar?"

Oscar didn't say. Slim said, "Go out and tie 'em in hard-knots, Oscar. I'll unfasten the door for yuh."

"Ay am satisfied," grunted Oscar.

There was no more shooting. Slim said, "It stands t' reason that they wouldn't stick around here."

"Go out and take a look," suggested Frijole.

"Well, I don't reckon that's necessary. After all—"

"That's what I thought," said Frijole. "I'll git me a lantern and see what's what."

"Make yourself a lighted target?" gasped Slim. "Go out, if yuh must, but make 'em shoot yuh in the dark."

"They cain't scare me," declared the little cook. "You scorpions stay right here and I'll drag 'em in and introduce 'em to yuh."

"Let's all be crazy," suggested Slim. "C'mon, Oscar."

Everything was serene outside, until Frijole yelled, "Here's a loose horse!" He swung the lantern high, and called again, "Blood on the saddle! Somethin' happened!"

They went slowly down to the front gate.

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There was another loose horse just outside the fence. A short distance beyond the gate were two dark objects on the ground. Fearfully, the three men went over and took a good look. Two dead men were sprawled in the road, riddled with buckshot.

"Henry Pierce and Jim Bailey—deader'n doorknobs," said Frijole.

"That shore makes a shortage of commissioners," observed Slim.

"Ay vill tell Henry," said Oscar, and headed for the stable.

Slim and Frijole went back to the house, opened a fresh jug, and filled their cups. Slim said, "I'd shore like to know why anybody'd bush them two men. It don't make—he-e-ey! Frijole, could it be that somebody made a mistake? Thought them two was Henry and Judge? Huh?"

"That's what I said, Slim."

"You never said anythin'."

"Well, I thought it. 'Course, that's what happened. They said they'd kill Henry if he showed any brains."

Slim refilled the cups and leaned across the table. "Frijole, they ain't never goin' to shoot us for our beauty or brains. Our only lookout is horse-stealin' or rustlin' cows."

"Viva la ignorancia!" said Frijole.

HENRY and Judge, fast asleep in their room, were awakened by a banging fist on their door. Judge jerked upright and yelled:

"Who is that? Henry! They are knocking."

Henry pawed for his gun, felt his way to the blocked door, and said sleepily, "Who is it?"

"Das is O-scar Yohnson," replied the big Swede.

"Glad to see—what am I saying? Is anything wrong, Oscar?"

"Yah, su-ure. Two men full of buckshot at the ranch, Hanry."

"Two men—great heavens! Oscar, you don't mean—"

"Ay am not lying to you. Hanry Pierce and Yim Bailey."

"Pierce and Bailey? Oscar, you must be joking."

"Ay am not yoking."

"You mean to stand there and tell us that Pierce and Bailey were killed at the JHC?"

"Yah."

"Who killed them?"

"Ay vill go and find Doc Bogart," said Oscar.

Judge lighted the lamp, and they dressed hurriedly. Oscar had spread the news, having met the cowboy who came out to find Henry. Men were talking loudly on the street.

"Judge, it is better to pull on your pants, before you put on your boots," said Henry quietly.

JUDGE looked Henry over critically and said, "At least, you might put on a pair of pants, Henry. Men are wearing them this year."

"All right, sir—if you will please take off the pair you are struggling with—I shall be glad to put them on. After all, knee-breeches went out of style long ago, Judge."

They found a crowd around the hotel lobby. Dr. Bogart came in with Oscar, and they all started for the ranch. Henry and Judge crowded into the buggy with the doctor, who said:

"Of course, you have heard that masked men kidnapped John Campbell at supper-time this evening."

"No!" gasped Henry. "Doc, you don't mean that!"

"I wish I didn't, Henry. They sneaked in, stuck them all up, tied Gibson and his wife, and took John away with them. It must have taken Gibson two hours to get loose and sound the alarm. And now, they say that Pierce and Bailey are dead. Henry, this country is becoming very unsafe."

"Yes, I—I believe you are right, Doctor. Judge, why don't you say something."

"I am afraid to open my mouth, Henry—afraid I might get lockjaw."

Frijole and Slim met them at the gate with a lantern, and the doctor's examination was brief. Both men had been killed instantly. Fortunately, both were without wives or families. Henry was sure that these two men had been mistaken for himself and Judge, but did not voice his feelings in the matter. And the kidnapping of John Campbell gave him a very empty feeling in his stomach. Campbell must have been removed to prevent him from receiving the letter Henry said he had written, telling of his findings in the case. Of course, the killers had taken it for granted that Henry

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would be no problem. After all, his luck couldn't last forever.

"The best-laid plans of mice and men, Henry," remarked Judge.

"I feel more like praying than bragging, my friend."

Henry sat on the edge of the bed, one boot in his hand, his eyes wrinkled thoughtfully. "It just came to me," he said slowly, "that the hand is no nearer played out than it was hours ago. Two men have died, one has been made captive—but nothing has been proved."

SOMEONE knocked on the door, which had been blocked again. It was James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly. Henry let him in. He said, "I just got the news about Pierce and Bailey—and the disappearance of John Campbell. Have you any statement to make, Conroy?"

"Yes," replied Henry soberly, his voice quiet, "I have a statement to make, Pelly. I hope you take it seriously. I admit that I am given to quip and idle jest, but just now I am very serious. The statement is simply this; you get to hell out of here, before I bend a gun barrel over your empty head."

James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly took one quizzical look at the face of Henry Conroy—and left, softly closing the door behind him.

"That statement," said Judge, "will never appear in print."

Henry looked at his watch and crawled into bed.

"We have exactly three hours to sleep," he said, and stretched out in his bed, Judge looked at his watch, squinted at Henry and said:

"Three hours?"

"Three," repeated Henry. "Then we go riding."

Judge, for once in his life, did not ask where; he was too tired to care where they went. Judge hated to ride a horse, hated high-heel boots. He rode a small horse, and his stirrups reached almost to the ground, while Henry rode a tall sorrel. Judge grumbled over having to get out at four o'clock in the morning, but Henry paid no attention. They did not ride by way of the main street, but circled out to the road to the Lazy L. It was very dark, but they were not in a hurry. After a mile or two Judge said, "I suppose I am to be kept in the dark as to the cause of this pilgrimage, Henry."

"Unless you are unusually bright, Judge," replied Henry. "In fact, I am just a bit in the dark myself. This move is from pure desperation, Judge. In my opinion, even a foolish, meaningless move is far better than to sit in town and get shot."

"Yes, I suppose it is."

After a while Judge said, "If we are going to see Ed Parker, I may tell you that his horse was still at the King's Castle hitch-rack when we left town."

"This," replied Henry, "is not exactly a social call. In fact, I have no idea what will happen. In other words, Judge, this whole thing is in the lap of the goddess of Luck."

"All I can say is—I hope the Old Lady don't shake her skirts."

THERE was barely a trace of daylight in the east, as they came in close to the Lazy L. Henry led the way through an old watercourse, heavily wooded with sycamores, and stopped about two hundred yards from the ranchhouse. They dismounted and sat down on the ground. Judge growled, "I might as well die from a bullet as from rheumatism."

"Every man to his own taste," remarked Henry.

"Or starve to death," complained Judge. "But you would come—and at this ungodly hour!"

"They may invite us in for breakfast, Judge."

Judge grunted quietly and shifted his position. Slowly the light flooded the hills,

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and the glow of a rising sun painted the east.

A door banged at the ranchhouse and they saw a man come out from the kitchen. He stretched, walked out to the woodpile and began chopping wood. Henry said, "That would be Chili Ortez, the cook."

"Clever deduction, Mr. Holmes," said Judge wearily. "It could not be Mr. Parker, because he is still in town—and who ever heard of a cowboy cutting wood?"

"Perfect reasoning, my dear Watson," said Henry soberly.

The cook went back with his wood, and in a few minutes a plume of smoke came from the stove-pipe in the kitchen. The Lazy L did not awaken with enthusiasm. After a while another man came out, leaned against a porch post and considered the situation. Finally, he went down to the stable, presumably to feed the stock. Another came out, sat down on the steps, smoking a cigarette.

It was quite a while before the cook came out on the kitchen step, struck one light blow against a suspended triangle of steel, and went back. It was the signal to come and get it—or I'll throw it away.

Judge yawned and proceeded to go to sleep, his shoulders against the bole of a sycamore, while Henry watched the ranchhouse. After another half-hour two men came from the house, went to the stable, where they saddled their horses and rode toward Tonto City.

"That," said Henry aloud, "leaves Partee, the cook and one more cowboy."

"Eh?" grunted Judge, waking up quickly. "Oh, yes, I must have dozed."

"You slept for a half-hour."

"Nonsense! I merely closed my eyes, sir."

"We will leave the horses behind the stable," said Henry, "and walk up to the house. Two men left for town a while ago, Judge."

"Oh, yes, I believe I heard you say they did. Well?"

"Who knows whether it will be well or bad—but we shall soon have a fairly clear idea."

THEY left the horses and went slowly up to the house. The kitchen door was open, and they went in that direction. Suddenly Harry Rush stepped out of the house, started to enter the yard, but saw them and jerked to a stop, the color quickly fading from his face, his eyes wide. They stood and looked at him. Henry said, "Good morning, Harry."

Slowly, the lanky cowpoke relaxed, his eyes came back to normal, and he seemed to almost smile. But, quick as a flash, he drew a gun and covered them.

"Hold it, you lucky old fools!" he rasped. "Don't move!"

"Naturally not," replied Henry calmly.

RUSH studied them narrowly. "I thought you was dead," he said.

"A natural mistake," remarked Henry. "You boys got Pierce and Bailey, instead."

Rush's jaw dropped, but he didn't relax this time. "Pierce and Bailey!" he exclaimed huskily. What was them two fools—"

"Nobody knows," said Henry. "It just happened, Rush. Sorry?"

"Why be sorry? Two less to split with—and they'd take it, too."

"I see."

"Turn around and head for the stable—I need a horse."

"Horse?" asked Judge.

"Yes—a horse. One of those four-legged critters. Start goin'."

Rush herded them down to the stable and forced Henry to saddle a horse for him. Henry was not too adept at this sort of thing, but did his best. Henry and Judge still had their guns, but knew better than to try and use them. After the horse was saddled, Rush took their guns and shoved them inside his own belt.

Then he herded them back to the house, stopping near the kitchen doorway and dropping his reins. Henry and Judge stood there together, wondering what the man's next move would be. Rush seemed to be pondering his next act carefully. He squinted at Henry and Judge thoughtfully. Finally, he said:

"So Pierce and Baily are dead, eh?"

"Yes, that's is true," replied Henry. "Loaded with buckshot."

"Sorry, but I'm out of buckshot," said Rush grimly. "But this is the end of the trail for you two. This time—there won't be any mistake."

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Rush deliberately cocked his gun, his lips drawn in a thin line.

"This is the finish," he said tensely. "Which one goes first?"

"You mean—" gasped Judge.

"Which one goes first?" repeated Rush.

"You!" snapped a voice from the doorway.

Rush whirled, but just in time to get a bullet from Slim Partee's gun. Rush stumbled, went to his knees, reaching out as though trying to grasp something, and then pitched forward on his face.

Henry and Judge stood there, trembling, hardly realizing that Rush had been balked in his murderous ideas. Partee was coming from the doorway, hatless, coatless, his shirt torn, blood on his face. His eyes shifted to Rush, but quickly back to Henry and Judge.

"No foolin', you two," he said. "I'm takin' that horse—and don't try to stop me."

"Naturally not," said Henry. "Take the horse, along with my blessing. Thank you, Partee."

Partee said nothing. He swung into the saddle, looked down at Rush, whirled the horse around and galloped toward Tonto City. Henry took their two guns from inside Rush's belt, and gave one to Judge. Judge said, "I—I've got to sit down, Henry—my knees fail me."

They both sank down on the porch and looked at each other.

"Do you realize that that man was going to murder us?" asked Judge.

"Where do you think I got this chalk makeup, my friend? We will never be closer to death than that—and not make good. But where on earth did Partee come from?"

"His wrists were bleeding," remarked Judge. "I—I imagine that he had been tied up—and just got loose."

"Oh, my goodness!" exclaimed Henry. "We forgot Chili Ortez—the cook! He might——"

"He hasn't yet," said Judge wearily. "Perhaps he went away."

"I don't care," sighed Henry. "We are well rid of Rush, a very impetuous person, it seems. As for Chili Ortez—"

"Sh-h-h-h!" hissed Judge.

They could hear a man stumbling through the house. Henry drew his gun and swung around on the corner of the porch, as the cook almost fell off the kitchen porch. He was bleeding from a welt on his head, and didn't seem to know what was going on.

"Got . . . away . . . *Madre de Dios!* Sometheeng—ees—wrong—" he muttered.

Then he stumbled over the body of Rush, and went sprawling.

"Right, my friend," said Henry. "Everything is wrong."

Henry got up and walked over to Ortez. Judge said, "What on earth are you doing, Henry?"

"As a precautionary measure," replied Henry, "I am locking Rush and Ortez together with handcuffs. There! I don't believe either of them will go far."

"What next?" complained Judge wearily.

"I believe," replied Henry, "we better search the house. After all, it is the duty of the law to investigate things."

They went into the ranchhouse, a sprawling structure, going from room to room, and in a back room, stretched out on a cot, they found John Campbell, the prosecuting attorney of Wild Horse Valley. Campbell was well tied, blindfolded, but not gagged.

"Who are you?" he croaked.

"Three guesses, John," replied Henry.

"Henry! My God, how did you find me? I thought I heard your voice, but I wasn't sure of it. Where am I, Henry?"

"The Lazy L ranchhouse," replied Henry, tugging at the ropes.

"I heard shots, Henry. What happened?"

Henry pulled away the blindfold, and the lawyer sat up, blinking at the sunlight through a dirty window. He spat dryly and tried to grin.

Henry said, "Judge, you better watch the front of the place."

Judge limped away, and Campbell said, "I'd never been quite so happy in my life, Henry. How did you find me?"

"Guess-work and a lot of luck, John," replied Henry, and told Campbell what happened at the JHC. The lawyer listened in amazement.

"They killed Pierce and Bailey," he said slowly. "Mistook them for you and Judge. Henry, this is terrible. You say that Rush is dead, too?"

"Yes, John, I believe he is. He and Ortez are handcuffed together out there by the kitchen door. Things have happened so fast that I can hardly understand it myself. Powers and Hill went to town, I

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suppose, and Partee followed them. Parker stayed there all night, I believe."

CAMPBELL stared thoughtfully at the dusty floor. "They told me I was not going to get hurt," he said. "They said they had already killed you, and they didn't want me to get that letter you wrote. I didn't know who they were—nor where they took me. You see, they tied me on a horse and blindfolded me in Tonto City. I—I believe they lied, Henry—I don't believe I was to go back."

"It didn't seem to be their policy, John."

"But hadn't we better get out of here, Henry?"

Henry shook his head. "John, I have a feeling that some of them will come back here. Perhaps I am wrong—but I want to be here, when they do."

"Yes, I suppose so. If I had a gun—"

"Here is Rush's gun—I'm keeping it for a souvenir. It almost killed off the last of the Conroy tribe. I—I rather hope we do not have to use guns, John—but if we do——"

It was quite a while before Judge came hurrying to the doorway, and said excitedly, "A man coming, Henry! I saw him, far down the road! And he seems in a hurry."

They crowded around the doorway to the main room, waiting for whoever it might be, almost concealed, but in a position to see most of the room. They heard the pounding of hoofs as the man drew up at the front porch, and they heard him cross the wooden porch. Coming in from the road, he was unable to see the two men on the ground by the kitchen door.

The front door banged open, and they saw Ed Parker. He had a smear of blood across one cheek, and had lost his hat. He stopped short, listening, tensed. There was not a sound. Muttering a curse he stepped ahead, almost to the big, stone fireplace, where he dropped to his knees and shoved an old rug aside. Quickly he removed a short section of board.

Then he got quickly to his feet, went over to a front window, where he looked out intently, before coming back. They saw him lean down close to the floor and begin taking out paper-wrapped bundles, piling them up on the floor. Parker was working feverishly, panting a little.

Henry gently shoved Judge and Campbell back, and stepped into the room, gun in hand. Parker got up on his haunches and reached for the board, when Henry said:

"Cleaning out another bank, Mr. Parker?"

PARKER'S reaction was electrical. He flung himself sideways, taking the rugs with him, whirled on his knees and swung up his gun. But Henry expected just such a move. With the big Colt in both hands, he fired just as Parker's gun came up. Parker fired, too, but his bullet struck the wall above Henry's head. Parker tried to stay upright, but the effort was too much. He surged ahead on his knees and almost fell into the hole. His right arm sagged down there, as though his last move was to try and recover more loot.

Judge and the lawyer came out, tensed, trembling a little. They had not seen exactly what happened. Henry sat down in a chair and drew a deep breath, the big gun still clutched in his hand.

Judge ran quickly to the front door, which was open about a foot, and looked down the road.

"Another rider coming!" he blurted. "Will this never end?"

Henry, his legs trembling, went over to the doorway, as the rider came through the ranch gateway. It was Slim Partee, swaying in his saddle like a drunken man. He drew up short at the porch, sprawled across the neck of his horse, but still had the strength, or determination, to get down. Henry watched him curiously. Judging from the blood on his shirt, Partee had been shot twice.

Evidently he was too badly hurt to be cautious, because he came on, staggering, his head low. His toe caught on the lower step of the two-step porch, and he sprawled over the steps and partly on the porch. His gun slid from his fingers.

Henry picked up the gun. Partee was trying to get up, and Judge helped Campbell ease him up on the porch. Partee said, "Parker—here?"

"Parker is dead, Partee," said Judge.

"Dead, eh?" Partee laughed chokingly. "Good. I got Powers and Hill, I think, but Parker got away, damn his soul. They got me, too. Game's played out."

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Partee stopped talking and his blurred eyes looked up at them.

"Who are you?" he asked.

Henry told him, and Partee laughed. "The dumb are still alive," he said. "Bad hunch. I worked with 'em before. They came here to go straight. Parker reneged. I came to help the law. Year-a-ah?" Partee laughed. He seemed to think it was funny. He said, "I came to put the deadwood on Parker—not for the law, but for Pierce and Bailey. They wanted their cut.

"I'm Lucky Lane—worth ten thousand, dead or alive—in Montana. They didn't know that Tom Lorenz was my brother. His name was Tom Lane, I called myself Partee—my mother's name. I swore I'd kill the men who shot Tom. They got scared and tied me up—but I got loose. I had to hit Ortez. He's all right—honest, but dumb."

He closed his eyes, and they thought he was gone, but he opened them, his eyes clouding fast, and whispered:

"Get that ten thousand . . . in . . . Montana . . . and . . . give it to . . . Lucky . . . the kid . . . in . . . red. Turn up that . . . lamp."

They were silent for several moments, and then Henry said:

"The lamp went out, my friend."

THEN the yard was suddenly filled with riders, spreading out to cover all exits. Oscar, Frijole and Slim were there, and it seemed that every able-bodied rider was there, too. Henry called from the doorway, and they dismounted swiftly, crowding into the place. Oscar Johnson bellowed, "What the ha-al has been going on around haar?"

"Three dead men and one prisoner!" exclaimed Frijole. "Henry, that Partee feller got Jud Powers and Clete Hill in town. Man, it was like a Fourth of July for a few minutes. We follered Partee."

"Here's John Campbell!" yelled a cowboy.

Campbell smiled and said, "Thanks to Henry Conroy."

Al Crews, boss of the King's Castle, came, bringing James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly, in a buggy. Oscar said, "Ay vill squirsh him for you, Hanry."

"Have done," said Henry. "The man is almost human."

The story was quickly told. Ortiz was the only survivor, and he was too dazed to even tell what little he knew. His job had been to keep an eye on Partee, but he had failed. He said, "I don' look one time, and eet ees too lates, I theenk. He bomp me on the *cabeza*."

They put all the loot into a gunny-sack, and John Campbell rode back in a buggy, his feet on top of it. Some of the men took the bodies back in the Lazy L wagon, and the cavalcade went home. Judge and Henry, hungry and tired, stabled their horses and went into the office. James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly followed them in. None of the three men said anything; just sat down and looked at each other.

"Well, we are still alive, Judge," Henry finally remarked.

"I heard they gave you only twenty-four hours to get out," remarked Pelly. "Is that true?"

Henry nodded wearily. "Yes, it is, Mr. Pelly. Man proposes, but God disposes, I believe."

Judge cleared his throat raspingly and shifted his lanky frame in his chair.

"I was about to remark," he said, "that anything can happen in Arizona—but I won't say it. No more strange things happen in Arizona than any other state in the Union."

"Do you know what I'd like?" asked Pelly seriously.

"That," replied Henry, "would be a revelation of desire, sir. But I shall ask you—what would you like?"

"I would like to have Judge get the jug and the cups."

For fully a minute Henry and Judge stared at Pelly. Then Henry took a deep breath and said:

"Judge, you may as well retract your last statement—Arizona still leads."

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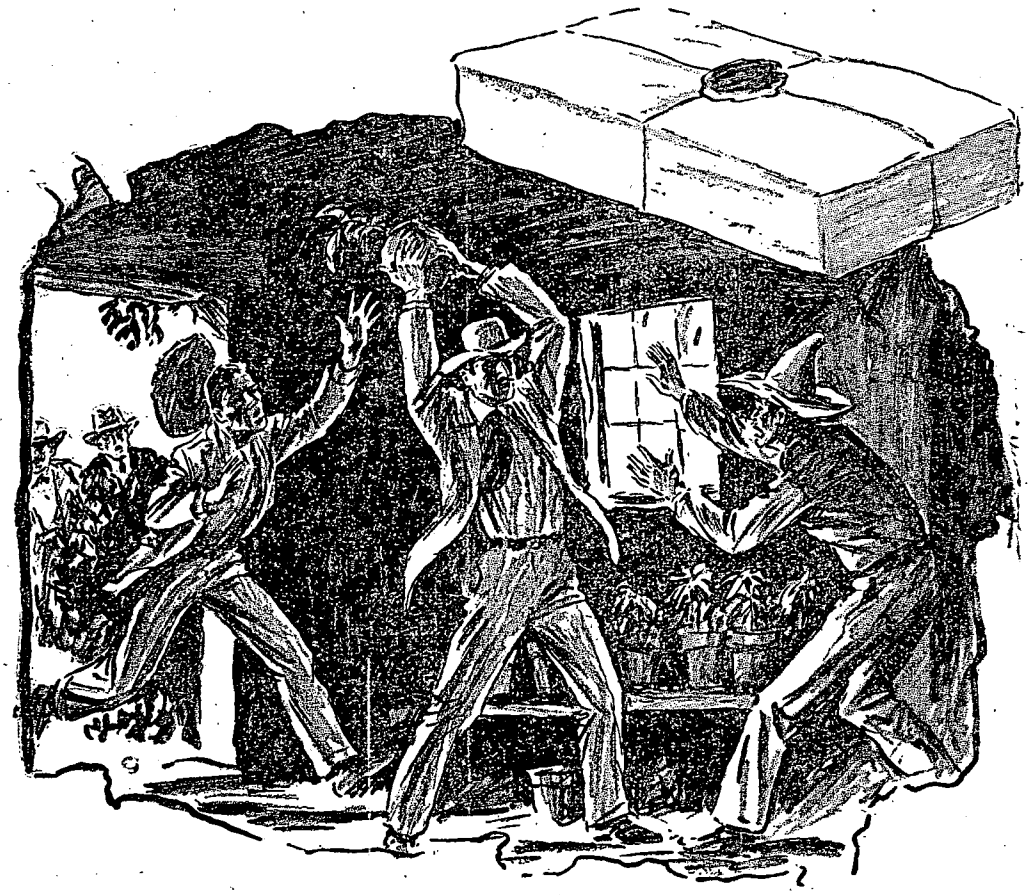
Another of Harden Bayle's Strange Quests—Along a Trail of Intrigue and Violence



LETTERS UNDER SEAL

By B. E. COOK

WHEN I was a lad," said Harden Bayle, "I used to visit my great Aunt Marcia on the farm. You remember her—and the farm?"

I'd been there. Typical New England from down Tiverton Four Corners in beautiful lower Rhode Island. Typical great aunt, too. What was Bayle leading up to? His great aunt had been dead for years and I hadn't the slightest idea what had occurred on that farm.

"Still in the family," he remarked in that uncanny way of answering my unspoken questions. "The first Bayle secured it as a colonial grant, cleared the land and planted his corn patch before the Revolution. Bless me, one of the critical skirmishes with King Philip's Indians cut across the upper field!"

I settled deeper into my chair. If I was here to be taught history—had Bayle at last entered that mellow age which flowers into reminiscence? It didn't ring true; he would never mellow, he hardened with the years instead. No, he was on the scent of some new bit of forbidden loot and until he chose to come out with it I must endure this rambling.

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But what the devil was he up to now? Being the one who must fetch it, quite naturally I was curious, but as for asking him? Not me!

"That old house was at least the third one to stand on the spot," he continued. "Fire took its toll in those times, fire and war, but strangely enough the old barn hung on. Made them well in those days, stout, heavy beams and timbers dowelled to last.

"I would be fifteen or so when I found an old powder horn up in the loft, pushed away back under the eaves. I took it to Uncle Henry who explained what it was and said doubtless it had been hidden there since the Revolution."

"So that explains this secret room," I put in, "a throwback to your forebears who also hid their unlawful possessions in the hayloft."

Bayle should have looked the room around and muttered, "So he calls this a hayloft." He didn't. He gave not the slightest sign that he had heard me, appearing, rather, lost in his memories. "Uncle Henry warned me to keep that ancient horn away from the fire as there might still be powder clinging to its sides. Imagine how that warning struck a fifteen year old boy —like waving a red flag in the bull's face. Just as soon as Uncle Henry was out of the house, into the kitchen I took the horn, propped it up in the iron sink and threw a lighted match into it. That is how it happened that the old Bayle farm sported the first white enamel sink in the town.

"I had to work in the fields until I'd paid for the damages in addition to cleaning up the mess I'd made. My father stood right back of Uncle Henry in this and I suspect it was he who set the low rate of my pay. First money I ever earned and Aunt Marcia got the model kitchen which became the talk of the town.

"She said the powder horn was providential. Well, if I were of a—oh, a philosophical turn of mind, I might dwell on this view: old powder horn lying hidden, always a potential danger close above the hay loft until fate or what have you employs a curious lad of fifteen as its agent, just when the old kitchen needed doing over. More than a century it had been stowed away up there."

I shifted in my chair. "Might rate as a parable if one looks at it in a certain way. All over the world are potential powder horns hidden under eaves, seemingly interestingly old relics, actually with powder enough clinging to their sides to blow up a kitchen—or even a nation."

His eyes narrowed. His voice sharpened. I knew what that meant: Bayle was getting down to brass tacks and I didn't like the sound of it because something political would be involved. All too well I recognized that as simple a thing as the explosion of a powder horn could set off a chain of events capable of ending our entire civilization.

For months, now, earnest men had done their best to reach workable understandings between nations, to smooth out natural differences before they became quarrels or wars, to prove that dealings between nations can be handled over the conference tables. Time and again the tightrope they walked so precariously had swayed; so far they had stayed on . . . and Harden Bayle would risk joggling that rope to bring another piece of loot to this room? "For God's sake, Bayle," I beseeched him, "lay off. If there's something you want, buy it. American money still speaks its piece wherever there's an open palm to reach out for it, regardless of any attitude toward our capitalism."

Bayle raised his brows. "I fear you jump to conclusions. The country involved has never foresworn the power of good, hard cash. No, I doubt if it is a matter of buying; it will require skill such as only you possess." He was baiting me now. "In many countries there is a question as to these United States. Is she really the good friend she purports to be or has she imperialistic designs? A touchy matter these days. What of certain air and naval bases? Are they defensive or are they steps toward world domination? Is the idea new or have we entertained it from the start? Many ask these questions and those who profit by confusion and hatreds whisper behind their hands."

"And meddlers like yourself, too old to be caught in the fighting and certain to profit from a war—"

"Hold on there!" he broke in. "Don't you ever grant me credit for some degree of patriotism?"

"Never," I snapped back at him. For I remembered the case of the sacred scroll

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and the Japanese troublemaker whom Bayle sheltered. "You'd sell this country down-river any time to satisfy a whim of yours. When you look back to those worthy farmers who settled Rhode Island, who—"

"Carved homes from the wilderness, fought savage Indians and tyrant Tories—yes, I know. An unworthy son of such ancestors. Oh sure. And how about yourself?"

DAMN his gutter soul! He knows how to apply the screws. Aye, how about me? Not even as much to offer as Bayle, for he had all the outward earmarks of success while I? I did his bidding. But one emotion still hums within me which has withered to nothing in Bayle: whenever I see The Flag at a masthead in a foreign port, my throat tightens up. If ever I draw the line between his orders and what I will *not* do, it will be because it might dishonor that flag or subject it to danger. I had never been obliged to draw that line. Was this to be the time? And would I actually deny Bayle?

I caught him watching me with that inscrutable expression. I didn't doubt that he was sensing my thoughts. If so, now was the time to have it out. Let it come.

"There's a certain paper, or papers, concerning Colombia that I want for this room. Whether they could be a powder horn, I can't say: nobody can till the seals are broken, and they were set in 1865. No living man knows what is written in those papers, but the fact remains that half the nations in this so-called civilized world would give their last inflated piece of currency to know."

1865! Something to do with the Civil War? How could any paper that old hold a threat to the present? Nearly a century had passed. But the powder horn? That, too, had been hidden and dangerous for a much longer time. Colombia? What dealings of importance could this country have had with Colombia at that peculiar moment in our history, and what implications could it have today?

On and on went Bayle in that maddening style. "Yes, no one knows their contents. Early in '65, President Lincoln sent a mission to Colombia. Very confidential. Panama then was a state in Colombia. Then was fifteen years before the French attempted to build a canal, but there were conjectures about Lincoln's mission. Did he seek permission to move troops across the isthmus, cutting down the distance to our west coast's new states? Had he a plan to fulfill his dream of a free state for Negroes down there?

"Or was pressure being applied by some nation with imperialistic designs? This might be a push to the south, remember, for at the time, Seward was greedy for territory. Mexico stood in perilous position then. . . . Well, your guess is as good as mine. There were several trips back and forth with confidential correspondence, then Lincoln was assassinated. Far as we know, the matter was dropped.

"Only a fraction of that correspondence ever was made known to the public, first because the state department considered it inexpedient, and second because all of Lincoln's own correspondence in the matter was padlocked by his son Robert, thus to remain for fifty years—then it was padlocked again for another fifty, to be opened in 1965."

"So," said I, "I'm to jimmy that padlock? Your desire for them is based on the fact that they've been hidden all these years, like your powder horn. But since the seal is set for another decade, there's no urgency that I can see. You aren't expecting somebody in the state department to deliver them to an unfriendly nation to make capital of at present, now are you?"

He ignored the question. "Correspondence means letters back and forth between two parties; Lincoln's may be safely locked away here, but it isn't likely that all the letters concerned were in his possession when he was assassinated. Remember, the affair was going on when he died."

"You want, then, the other fellow's letters. Were they padlocked too?"

"That's the strange part of it. Evidently they were because in all the years there's been no mention of them till now. Of course, they might have been confiscated since the affair ended with Lincoln's death. I find that on the recent death of an aged man in Colombia certain sealed papers have been found. Mind, this is not common knowledge; I've my own channels of information.

"The story is that they were sealed, like

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Lincoln's, for fifty years, then for a second fifty. A certain collaboration is indicated—if rumor is true. Just why should somebody duplicate Lincoln's son's procedure? We can only guess. Perhaps those papers were harmless; perhaps they were dynamite. Maybe both sides had the goods, one on the other in a case of dog eat dog should the news get out. There could have been arguments of mutual benefit half concluded or threats which still remain a possibility.

"You know of the exciting affairs down there in Colombia of late and once the violence crops out, greater violence is possible. Correspondence which could have been routine nearly a century ago might be construed otherwise today if the voice of a trouble maker interpreted the matter to an aroused people."

"Then for once you are bent upon acting for the good of your country."

"Incidentally, yes. I'm granting you that privilege. I want that sealed correspondence for this room."

SO MANY threads did Bayle weave into his close-woven pattern of interests that it was not surprising that the old *Edgemont* loaded with an immediate cargo for the Canal Zone. Bayle's contribution toward my quest—also a certain name and address plus the usual blank check.

The *Edgemont* put out in a rising storm. She wallowed so badly over Five Fathom and on past the Cape Charles Lightship that the skipper grumbled, "Some such day this old tub'll crack open just for'd o' the bridge from the bulwarks three quarters down and go to bottom." Yet, for myself out here with only seas and winds to deal with, life became simple. Oustide, a man knows what he is up against and can plan accordingly—plug the hawse holes, secure cordage and sound tanks.

I could lay no plans regarding Bayle's latest mission, knew nothing about the man whose name he had given me. Could I "reach" him by playing crafty or by playing the long green that folds? Were there other bidders for the same prize I sought? I couldn't even be positive the papers would be authentic or that they weren't phonies prepared by some opportunist for profit—or to start trouble. Absolutely nothing to go on, I was in the dark.

But I must start on some hypothesis. The stranger with whom I'd deal, for instance, would doubtless be Latin. If he was offering the papers to the highest bidder, he'd be very much on the make or he'd be working to make trouble between our country and —you guess whom. If he shouldn't wish to sell, if he was strictly honorable and bent on maintaining good will between ours and another nation, my money might not talk loud enough.

I'd have to play it smart.

Considering the unsettled conditions in that little country of his, I'll not use the name of the man Bayle gave me; call him Senor Draco instead. His address was in Bogota with a notation that he might be outside the country on occasion. Purely on a hunch, then, I presumed that Senor Draco had a large hacienda in the countryside and a city home. I knew little about Colombia but from contacts with other Latin American nations with Spanish origins, men of Draco's class are the hardest folks on earth to get next to. Especially hard for us Yankees. They are hot and fierce for their honor which doesn't at all jibe with our understanding of that word.

True, I had broken through the social ice in Lima to save the senorita and incidentally head off a coup, receiving as reward the picture Bayle still gloats over. But I'm not fool-enough to expect that luck to serve me twice.

When we docked, I was free to go my way. Unusual, of course, for a mate but this ship was Bayle controlled and he made the rules.

At the nearest airfield I engaged passage to Colombia, spotting a book on Colombia on my way since it never does any harm to know my ground at the start. A plane was leaving in two hours but every seat was engaged. That surprised me. Why the traffic? The ticket clerk spoke of a conference. In early April? Oh of course, a Pan-American one—and that "powder horn" under the eaves! No wonder it was urgent that I get in my lick pronto; this was more than one of Bayle's whims, it might be the match to set off oldtime explosives.

A view of the waiting list convinced me: useless to stick myself on. I might charter a private plane; none available. I entered a shop advertising souvenirs but bought none.

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I'd been here before and had learned all the secrets.

BACK to the airport half an hour before time, several men were already there waiting. I sized them up for the possibility of trading for one ticket as I'd done before. Occasionally there's one tourist who can use a bit of extra long green, in the airports back home, but none of these appeared to be the tourist type. Unless it would be that thickset, pudgy character slumped in his seat asleep, snoring through his half open mouth. His dark hair and skin suggested the Latin American, doubtless a Colombian en route home. All the others wore the alert manner of important affairs ahead of them. Mostly a cosmopolitan lot, mostly North Americans, I judged. I was looking for a certain type, some one who might vaguely resemble myself in the gathering twilight, when a tall, thin individual beside me nervously folded and unfolded a newspaper despite the fact it was now too dark to read it.

A plane came in. Under cover of the noise and attention it drew in the growing dusk, nobody noticed that one of the men cried out sharply and slapped at his arm as though he'd been badly bitten. And the loudspeaker announced that the plane for Colombia would arrive shortly, warning that it would take off as quickly as it could be refueled.

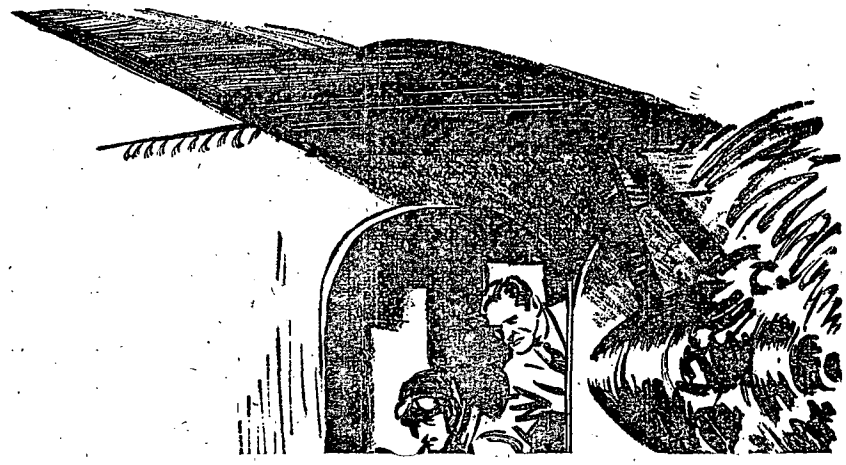
Again I stood beside the tall, thin fellow and he jerked himself backward abruptly at that announcement. An attendant came out to check passengers and nobody answered to the call: "Marcus Wellman." The name was repeated until a choking voice replied, "Here." This, the thin man, for some reason was not eager to go. Could I trade with him? Not a chance, he must be twenty pounds under my weight and four inches taller.

In the ensuing quiet, all listened for the coming plane—and I for something else. Behind me a person became suddenly, violently sick to his stomach so that all hands moved away from the vicinity. He cried out and fell writhing and calling for an attendant. I was the only one to offer a welcome hand when the ambulance arrived and somebody shouted a call for any who could identify the man. He seemed to bear no identification papers at all, no pocketbook, and none answered the call; so they took him away.

Our plane was in.

I've gone under a score of names in Bayle's business, but this time I didn't know who I was until I'd get the chance to glance into some papers which somehow were in my possession—no, I had not brought them to the airport. I find that working fast and maintaining a front about it will fool the best of observers, most of the time. It worked here. Under the name of Harry Mann I boarded that plane and nonchalantly perused my little volume on Colombia until the take off minute.

But I observed the pudgy one coming aboard and he wasn't so pudgy or soft as he had seemed while asleep. He was powerfully built. In passing my seat, his eyes met mine and they weren't brown, as anticipated. They were steely orbs and hard as flint. No, I do not always size up persons correctly.



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NOT UNTIL the final moment did the tall, thin one come in and occupy the seat beside me, still nervous as a witch, clearing his throat and twitching his shoulders. He jumped convulsively at the start of the motors, then settled back clinching both fists. We rolled away and he gasped, plain scared. After a pause, I said calmly, "We're well aloft now."

For the first time he seemed to see me, studying me to reply in an apologetic vein, "I'm a bit timid about the take off. Can't help it. I get over it after we're safely up but that starting is pure hell. It is not natural, you know, for man to fly."

After quite a long silence he said. "I don't suppose you are open to an offer?"

Just like that. It caught me rather off my guard, but I managed to say, "There are offers and . . . offers," feeling my way, "and many people to consider in accepting one."

A short, curt laugh and: "Which means the door is open?"

"Could be. What's all this game? I know neither you nor what you're driving at."

"You may not know me, but I know you, Harry Mann. I knew you were coming on this plane and saw to it that you'd sit right here where I could talk to you. Make me a reasonable offer, maybe a little more than reasonable if you'll just step aside? Perhaps you can guess whom I represent; he's ready to pay quite a price to get this without fuss. But I warn you, Mann, you'll never get away with it yourself. I shall see it destroyed before it falls into any hands but these two good hands of mine."

Zowie! Me soaring into clouds in a plane and this strange coincidence. But I couldn't realize it at the time, I was just plain befuddled. Did he really know Harry Mann or merely that Mann would occupy the seat? Nobody had spoken when it was asked at the airport whether any one could identify the sick fellow. Either this tall person couldn't do it or he'd been so preoccupied with his own fears that he hadn't realized the flurry.

Who would Mann be anyhow and why had he been on his way to Colombia? And who was this fellow beside me claiming to have known in advance about Mann's travelling on this plane, maneuvering for a seat next him? And for what reason? Certainly he couldn't possibly know what I was going after.

Evidently he and Mann were after the same thing, but that was neither here nor there to me. With a big conference going on, there could be lots of important matters in question. I felt uneasy because that conference happened to be a very touchy one and the sealed papers still, in my forefront of consciousness, bore a close resemblance to the old powder horn.

Said I: "I dislike talking business until I know whom I'm dealing with. Have you something, say a sort of password, to identify yourself?"

"Plenty. I am George Culpepper, but that means nothing to you. The name of Lingate, for instance, would serve better."

Lingate, Lingate. How or who Lingate? Not one ripple in my memory. But I didn't let on. I always enjoy a game of wits and this couldn't in any way tie up with my particular mission for Bayle. So I said, "Seems to me I've heard of the man. Any more passwords?"

"Likely enough you knew Lingate and no playing around about the dusky maiden either. We both know too much to fool with 'passwords.' Now then, are you in the market? That's the first approach and I'm prepared to pay in five digits although between you and me it's a lot of cash to spend for a pretty posey. Eh?"

In no conceivable fashion could I call a packet of dusty papers a "pretty posey" just so that I'd feel easy about our both being on scents, what I mean. You see, even with Bayle's splendid payoffs I could always use a bit of pin money. So, unless this matter interfered with my mission I might conceivably inhale some extra change. No harm knowing more about it anyway. I said, "I'm not in the market at all. The money isn't all to be considered in a case like this one."

"Oh I know although, between you and me, I can't see how they get so all fired stewed up over a flower. An orchid. Some guy gets out a new one like this fellow here, and nuts like Lingate, and that guy you work for goes off the deep end about it. To men, like you and myself who do the fetch-and-carry work, five figures would spell fortune—and here it is handed out simply to buy off a competitor.

"Well, Mann, I'll lay my cards on the

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table. Can't offer any more money but I've given you fair warning. Lingate says to bring it back with me or see that the cussed plant is ruined. He'd rather die than see your Ruttle get it ahead of him."

So-o-o. Here was one of those cases you read about, men lousy with money and all het up over an orchid. Handling out fabulous bribes and threats as though something really valuable were at stake, while the whole world held its breath, waiting perhaps for a powder horn to explode. Well, Bayle, too, must have what he fancied.

I lay back in my chair and said, "I'll have to think this over."

I TOOK my time thinking, plenty of it. Here was a chance to turn a pretty penny. I could take a reasonable bribe for laying off some flower named "dusky maiden" which I wouldn't take the gift of anyway. I'd lay off all right. I wondered how the real Harry Mann would have taken the offer. I had certainly given him his chance to get there first, and in a way I was entitled to that pay-off money. Don't make any mistake. I wasn't stifling down this still small voice in me. Far from it.

But I must be careful not to get involved in anything that would gum up Bayle's mission. Handled right it would make a corking story to tell Bayle when I got back. He'd appreciate the chicanery.

Thoughtfully I plucked at the place where my beard might have been, torn between loyalty and gold. Culpepper watched me furtively. Just how gullible was he? Should I give in at once or should I hold out?

The matter was still dragging along when we got our landing warning, but from his manner I knew he was quite sure of me.

Should I take the money now and be done with it? Had I sold too cheaply a thing that had no value to me whatever? And if this Lingate would buy off an opponent to the tune of five figures, why didn't he just take his dough, go there and compete? It wasn't too important to me, but I am plagued with a certain kind of curiosity. For instance, he didn't want me to even show up at the orchid shop. Was I supposed to have a prior calm? It looked that way. I took a chance.

"How did your Lingate come in on this anyway?"

I hit the bull's eye with one shot. He got all flustered, and yammered around and it disgusted me to see how little guile he had. I gathered that this Lingate had cut in on a private line, so to speak. My man Ruttle (supposing I was Mann) had negotiated for something rare in orchids, and Lingate would go to any ends to thwart his rival in the posey game. What a game for grown up men to be playing while the world trembles on the edge of dissolution.

"Stick around after we land," I said with a wink, "maybe we can fix things up."

But it wasn't so easy as all that. Seems that a guy had sent a pretty heated call from the Canal Zone saying that while he had been sick his papers had been stolen, and warning that someone was possibly trying to get into Colombia on his name. Could anyone on the plane positively identify me as Harry Mann? There was a dazed look in Culpepper's eyes which told me that while he had been hep to Harry Mann's traveling to Bogota and had done some wirepulling to get him for a seatmate, yet he didn't actually know the man. He was weighing things, trying to recall what he had said to me.

"Culpepper, here, knows me," I said bluffly, hoping the officer wouldn't note his hesitation. "He ought to. We're both out for the same gal—a dusky sort of maiden."

That for a reminder and it looked like I had stepped on his toe. "Yes, yes of course," he made haste, but an empty sound in his voice made it unconvincing. I could hear his mind clicking away, saying to himself, "If I let them take him away, even a few hours will give me my chance. I can have first go at the orchid and save all that cash."

The officer stood looking from him to me. What a mess. Without help of his suspicion I might have bluffed my way out, or in extremes offered some long green, but Culpepper's manner had put me on the spot. What a fool I had been to have any conversation with him at all! Now I was in the limelight. With this parley about due, any suspicious person would get a good overhauling. There was a faint smirk on Culpepper's face and I knew he was about to play smart. "Of course—" he

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started out, but a smooth voice broke in.

From the look on the officer's face and the way he drew himself up respectfully, I knew that someone of importance had come up behind me and had spoken. Worse and worse! I, who always shunned publicity, seemed to have the spotlight full on me. Whatever came, I'd have to meet it. I braced myself but never could I have foreseen the unbelievable thing that was happening, for the man was speaking reprovingly, "I hope you are not being discourteous to Mr. Mann. He is a friend of mine." I swung around. The pudgy man whom I had first seen asleep at the distant airport! I could only gape at what followed. The officer became obsequious and apologetic and was gone. Culpepper's face underwent a dozen changes. He, too, faded and with him my hope of easy money.

The pudgy man's hand seemed to rest lightly on my arm, but his grip bit into my flesh. I was cleared away from the airport speedily, and into a waiting automobile before he loosened his hold on me and sank down, slumping as he had been before and closing his eyes. Without orders the car sped to some unknown preordained destination. The man beside me might have been asleep, from his looks. If only I could get the door open I would risk a getaway. I moved my hand stealthily toward the handle.

"Sit back." There was no disputing a glint in his right hand. How or whence he had pulled the gun will remain a mystery. A damned smart draw, I grudgingly conceded. I never argue with a person like this; I just sit still and bide my time.

I couldn't figure him out. What did he want of Harry Mann, orchids? I doubted it. He wasn't the type. If he knew Mann as he said he did, he knew I was an impostor, yet he had shielded me. Why?

We drew up before a two-story house on a street full of similar residences. With his grip on my arm again we got out of the car and went up a short flight of steps to a front door. It opened as we came and let us into a dark hallway. I tried to see who had opened the door, dimly sensing somebody, but there wasn't light enough. My escort released his hold, jerked his head. Something hit me and blacked me out. This wasn't the first time I'd been conked, by any means, but never have I taken such a rap for anyone else. For an orchid fancier, Harry Mann had had a tough reception planned for him.

I DOUBT if I was out long, but I played cozy when I came to, straining to hear the voices from an open doorway down the hall. Seems like there'd been a delegation waiting for my pudgy friend and now he was explaining the bacon he'd delivered to them.

It must have been a cosmopolitan group for there were bits of Spanish, English, and English-with-a-foreign-twist. The smooth voice which had spoken from behind me when Culpepper was about to let me down, that of the pudgy man, seemed to be doing most of the talking, and in Spanish. Then a rough voice in English demanded, "What are you going to do with Mann?"

Mann! That meant me!

I was grateful that the reply was in English. Said the smooth voice, "Nothing at present. He can do no harm here so we'll keep him a while."

The rough voice demanded sharply, "Give me his papers. I can go and say I'm Mann, and he'll hand over."

That would be a good one on Culpepper. I hoped they would come and take away Mann's papers and release me. That would be a break!

But the smooth voice broke in: "Not so fast, Raffin. I'm handling Mann. And from now on, talk Spanish. These men don't like it when you and I shut them out."

Here was a bad break. Things come like that. From now on I couldn't understand what they'd say. I cursed my scant Spanish. I had been in Spanish-speaking ports enough but most of what I had picked up would not do in polite society. No use straining my ears to their jabber. They said the name "Mann" quite a lot and then another name came out of the babble, "Draco." Had I heard right? Mann and Draco, in the same sentence? Could it be the same Draco I was seeking? But Mann was after an orchid the same as Culpepper was. Culpepper had said so. Culpepper? What about him? He had tried to buy me off, mistaking me for Mann. Was it really an orchid that he and Mann were after? Bayle had said there were others on the scent of the letters. Was all this

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orchid business a blind about something that couldn't be mentioned openly? Culpepper hadn't mentioned Draco, but these folks had Mann and Draco tied up together. And after all, the bribe I'd been offered hadn't been chicken feed; it was a lot of cash to pay out for a flower. Had Culpepper been playing smart with me? I had taken Culpepper for a sort of ass, but he had certainly got a leap on me. And on these guys, too, for they sat here gabbling while he was at large and, without doubt, on his way. Was it to Senor Draco?

Inaction is hard enough for me under any circumstances, but now it became intolerable. I stretched my limbs. Nothing was binding me. So they didn't consider me dangerous enough to tie up. That served my purpose although I will own that it hurt my ego at being thus ignored. I lifted my head and then I saw why I had been left unfettered. A few feet away a lean, dark person was sitting in a chair. Presumably my guard, for a revolver dangled from his hand while he leaned forward, straining to hear what was being said in that room. I envied him his Spanish. So absorbed was he that he didn't notice that I had come to, or that I was inching my way nearer his chair. I knew I was taking a chance, for if I startled him he might let me have it.

THE voices in the room got more voluble and insistent and the man whom smooth-voice had called Raffin was mixing his Spanish and English. Smooth-voice seemed to be laying down the law to him, so my guard didn't know what happened when I reached up and took hold of a chair leg and jerked him off balance. I was on my feet like a cat and had that gun out of his hand. I even caught that chair before it banged down on the floor. In the dimness of the hall I could see the man's eyes brighten with fear. I gave him a tap on the bean and lowered him onto the floor in much the same position which I had been in a few minutes before. Now all that lay between me and Bayle's mission was that door. I must beat Culpepper to it. Just what he wanted of that sealed package I didn't bother to consider. Bayle had sent me, and Bayle expected me to make good.

Suddenly luck deserted me. At that moment there was a scraping of chairs in the room and footsteps into the hallway. I had barely time to get into the chair, hoping in the lack of light they wouldn't notice that there had been a shifting of personnel. Two men came out of the room, the pudgy one, and another whom I soon identified by his voice as Raffin. The latter halted by the prone figure but the other took him by the arm and drew him along. Well I knew the strength in that grip.

He said, this time in English, "I said *I* would look after him. I do things in my own way."

Raffin replied in as cold and nasty a voice as I ever expected to hear, "Okay. Do it your own way. But remember, if those letters are not in my hands by tomorrow noon, there will be violence."

A quick streak of light, a rush of air and I knew he had gone. Like a villain in oldtime melodramas. But he wasn't the kind to be bluffing, nor was smooth-voice. Where was this latter one? I felt positive he hadn't departed but try my best I got no inkling of him in there.

That sixth sense of mine insisted he was present. A prickly sensation tagged my neck. Still armed with the guard's gun, should I attempt to surprise him and make a getaway? Recalling the speed with which he drew in the car. I dropped that notion. All I could hope for was that in the scarcity of light out here he wouldn't see our change-about.

The man at my feet stirred and moaned. Hells bells, the scamp was reviving, the jig was up. I might as well turn around and face . . . those eyes on me, the massive, lowered bullish head all set to charge! I swung the gun up.

"Not loaded," he said coldly. "Never did give Ramos loaded weapons; might shoot someone." He rose, saying further, "Into the room. I shall talk with you."

I pulled the trigger; he had told the truth. The man on the floor rolled over and sat up as the pudgy one spat a bit of Spanish his way. It must have been caustic, the way the other one began to pour it on. He still was at it while I followed smooth-voice into the room and saw three gabbling in Spanish. My conductor got rid of them in unison, closed the door and indicated a chair while pacing the floor ponderously. Presently he faced me across a table.

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"I've known you were not Mann," he declared. "I went there to meet Mann. When we came in here, I had you put aside for a reason: I wanted Raffin to mistake you for Mann, especially not to recognize you. Now I'm wondering if you are one of Raffin's gang."

His eyes narrowed until the excess flesh on the cheekbones rose and nearly interrupted his vision. I'd seen this speculative expression on his too full face at the airport when I'd imagined him asleep. Smooth-voice asleep? Never. We studied each other and I wondered: did his palm itch? Otherwise why had he reserved me for himself? Well, Bayle never did question my expense account. Or, could he be bent on making trouble hereabouts as the big, vital conference started?

Raffin had threatened violence; how did these two men tie up? For what reason did he hold out on me here?

Obviously his mind, too, was working. On what? If he actually did know Mann was coming, did he wonder why I had butted in?

Maybe he knew about Culpepper.

By the way, what progress was that guy making while I sat here perforce? Hell! I must get going before my quest for Bayle failed—to say nothing of my status in this place. Still contemplating that fleshy face, I reminded myself: he knew about Draco, also the letters I wanted Raffin had distinctly said, "The letters must be in my hands by noon." There might be a score of Senors Draco in this city, but only one of them would have letters important enough to create all this to do.

Impatiently I broke the siege of silence. "Atom bombs are terrible visitors," I declared significantly. "Often a few written lines can be just as devastating."

Surprisingly, the big head nodded gravely and rumbled in sonorous tones, "Should have been destroyed when President Lincoln died. Should be destroyed now before they fall into wrong hands. I'm wondering if yours are the wrong hands, if Mann's were. Or had he been commissioned by somebody who also realized how dangerous the letters were with the purpose of getting them out of danger's way?" He lurched upward with a heavy sigh. "Why did you put Mann aside and assume his place? Am I hindering or serving by holding you?"

Damn his bloated carcass, he was utterly sincere. I reflected: airport officials had shown him exceptional respect and, although neither kidnapping nor knocking a man out is genteel, I realized how strange the explanations for matters of that sort can appear. So what next?

I PUT OUT a feeler. He reciprocated. We suggested fighters in the early rounds and the upshot was amazing, almost incredible. Said he tersely, "I am prepared, now, to be frank, senor. Name: Senor Ribalta—to you. Duties: in the service of the Colombian Government. Special assignment at present: the grave and delicate responsibility of keeping everything, ah, shall we say uneventful? while the great conference lasts."

I managed to conceal my amazement over the disclosure to me, a North American, while he continued. "Above all else, senor, we desire friendship and a better, mutual understanding between Colombia and the other republics in this hemisphere. Particularly, senor, no friction with the Colossus of North America." Then he revealed an intimate knowledge of the maneuvers of the international gang which stirs trouble wherever possible, thriving on confusion and distrust. He even talked of the "Old Guard" in his country, Spanish to the ultimate vertebra, he said, suspicious of Anglo-Saxon men and nations and opposed to any truck with us north of the Caribbean.

Under the circumstances, I reciprocated to show good faith. He plainly took the name I gave as a phoney, realizing that in my work one must operate incog'. Of course the great United States couldn't advertise such opposites as laying their cards face up on the conference tables and sending a man on a secret mission at the same time, he said. It would suggest that they didn't trust their neighbor.

So I made it plain that I'd come for the the letters in the Lincoln correspondence of the eighteen sixties. "They're too risky to be left at large any longer," I declared. "They must be destroyed."

Shades of Harden Bayle!

He agreed. We swapped detailed information and while I drew on my lively

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imagination somewhat, I'd swear that his very word was pure golden truth. He revealed that Senor Draco, simple but with little save his gobs of honor, had been bequeathed the sealed parcel of letters as a sort of heritage-trust. Lately, Draco had been under pressure to sell them, loan them, or even just to break the seal for a look-see. Politely but firmly, Draco had refused and withdrawn to his tiny shop and quiet life. There had been threats, but what Spaniard ever succumbed to threats?

NOW this man Raffin. Just where he stood in the matter was pure guesswork. Apparently with the Old Guard since he played along with them, yet his background was obscure, said Senor Ribalta wryly, and sometimes his methods indicated tougher handling than one expects from the genuine Spanish element. He must be expecting the letters to prove Uncle Sam the covetous and always scheming bully and he was determined to get the letters, print copies and sow them broadcast before, in this conference, Colombia could sell herself down the river to the North Americans. "That is the way he puts it," said Senor Ribalta heavily, "and to hell with honor and viva realism. Which smacks of a certain ideology. Si, senor?"

So Raffin was the golden boy of the Old Guard, eh? Then he'd get those damaging letters come hell or high water. Why not cool him in the cooler under some charge? Non, non; backing too powerful and he'd carefully done nothing offensive—yet. His threats of violence? Ribalta shrugged as Latins only can; threats of violence and Latins were as akin as beer and pretzels. "Now senor," said he, "how did you identify Mann with all this?"

Wow! I recalled how hastily I had scanned Mann's papers, how I had knocked him out. Whatever story I did give must sound impressive. But I merely admitted that Mann was only one of a gang of trouble makers. Others were Ruttle, Lingate and that Culpepper. Certainly he must be on Culpepper's trail, I declared, giving him an opportunity to bluff, but he confessed that he'd never heard of the man.

"What, senor? Why he's the one who sat besides me in the plane. Dangerous character. I was at his heels when he—"

"When I made the ass of myself," he interrupted contritely.

I discounted it, saying that he'd done what seemed correct at the time. "And if we get a move on we've still time to get Senor Draco," I urged.

This rather upset Senor Ribalta. He threw some fancy Spanish into the telephone and, manana notwithstanding, we got going pronto. That faux pas of his must have shaken his faith in himself, the way he waxed nervous. He goaded the chauffeur into more speed. We flew over the road. Culpepper, get to him!

I became uneasy myself. All we needed now was for Mann to appear from nowhere and claim his rights. I prodded him about Mann, aiming to keep him just as uncomfortable as I'd been during the inquiry. His tipoff, at least, had been genuine—from a cable company cooperating for the country's good. Smart-guy Mann had notified Senor Draco that he was accepting "his offer" and would arrive promptly and well heeled. Fancy how that information affected Ribalta, charged with keeping the trouble-makers calm. Honorable, impeccable Senor Draco selling his honor! Well heeled, plenty of money and that shrewd trading instinct of the Spanish waiting for him? But it was inconceivable that Senor Draco had actually yielded.

Somehow Raffin had got wind of it. He had his tentacles out everywhere. If honor was at last for sale, he and his backers would bid in too and he so had served notice. Now came Culpepper into it as further complication. It was all very confusing.

For once that room of Bayle's didn't loom so large, not in the face of various men striving for the Lincoln correspondence, each for his own reason. By now I recognized that Mann and Culpepper were bent on trouble making. As for Raffin, who was working for whom? Who with whom? It all spelled a bad break for the international conference. It became the old powder horn back there in Tiverton, only on a much vaster scale, even though it should prove to be as innocent as the old Elsie Dinsmore books.

Ah yes, but Harden Bayle had ordered me to get those letters for his museum up the Hudson.

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IN THE suburbs, we drew up to a small shop at the address Bayle had given me. The fact that I knew that address assured my validity with Senor Ribalta. We rapped. No response. We walked around the small building with its windows covered and noted a room or two in the rear. Yeah, a shop with living quarters out back, I presumed. Despite shaded windows, I heard from inside a sort of indistinct thumping. I let Ribalto break in; he had the law behind him and I certainly was in deep enough already.

The door gave easily. We looked in on a cooking stove of sorts and small things all around. But that dull thumping still sounded beyond another door and I waited for no more formalities. Out it swung for me and boy oh boy what I discovered! My heart filled my throat. I choked back a yell of delight. For there, gagged and trussed up as neatly as a chicken for the roast was my recent pain-in-the-neck Culpepper!

Ribalta was for releasing him, but I said lay off awhile while I enjoyed the sight, the gurgling sounds and the purple rage. I took in the place but discovered nothing like a hiding place for sealed letters. Bare room. So I went along with Ribalta back into the little shop, conscious of the evidence that somebody had been there before us. The place was a wreck. Could Culpepper have done it and then tied himself up? Nah, of course not. Nor would Draco have done it. Where was he?

Vases, woven baskets, some potted plants tossed around, some native jewelry—what a shakedown! Had Culpepper frisked the place and been caught by Draco? Hardly; he had come to buy, not destroy. Had Draco kept the letters here anyway? But where else? I doubted the idea of a safe deposit box and surely he'd not carry those letters with him through the years. Maybe this gurgling, protesting Culpepper had figured it the same. Had he tried to get smart?

Before returning to the back room, I gave that shop one quick going over, believe me, feeling for loose boards, looking for false bottoms in drawers and so on. By and by I went to Senor Ribalta keeping his eye on Culpepper.

He nodded. I released the prisoner and received a muttered, sullen thanks.

At first he refused to talk. He seemed to think that his assailant had been hand in glove with me, glowering at us with set lips. So Ribalta caught on and burst out in rapid fire Spanish. I got none of it, of course, but Culpepper did and he opened up. He'd had an appointment with Draco, had come to buy "you know what." It was not there. It was kept out in the country where Draco had a greenhouse and a garden. If Senor Culpepper would wait here for Senor Draco to go out there and fetch . . .

While Culpepper sat there alone, a man had burst in, mauled him, made a wreck of the shop and gone tearing away. The man? Well, he was dark but not really a Latin; spoke English, but in a rough, harsh voice. Raffin, of course!

"Which way did he go?"

Culpepper flushed. "Followed Draco. He, er, obliged me to say where the little senor went."

Yeah, thought I, Culpepper would spill; scare easily and spill it at the first show of fury. And Raffin, I was sure, would soon show fury. Yet the story didn't exactly add up.

Now Senor Ribalta questioned him and well he might for Culpepper was like an answer to a prayer for him. All he required to land Raffin in the hoosegow was one specific charge and here it was, assault and battery on an American citizen. And Culpepper gladly brought the charge, hoping plainly that I too would thus be disposed of. I grinned and he looked worried.

THE upshot was that we all piled into the official car and went headlong down a winding road into open country. We passed very few persons but Culpepper kept so sharp an eye on them that he ducked as we whizzed past a small fellow plodding along on foot. "Senor Draco!"

So Draco hadn't yet reached his greenhouse. But Raffin? Huh, he had raced on ahead of the man to ransack the property—or ambush Draco upon the latter's arrival. Sure enough, Ribalta recognized his car. It had been run into bushes beside the road around the bend from a little shanty with lush gardens all around. This was the place, evidently, where Draco, the man of honor and little else, concealed those dangerous papers?

We hauled up in the growth beyond

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Raffin's car, then stalked the place, Ribalta and I, leaving Culpepper under the eye of the chauffeur. Almost to the very sides of that tumbledown we crept in low, thick growth and found it to be merely a roof, a front and a board here and there up the sides.

And Raffin going through it precisely as he had the shop, leaving the same trail of confusion. He was not finding what he sought and it had him half crazed with rage. By and by he seemed to give it up, mounted a little stool and looked up the road for Senor Draco to appear. The Lord help that little fellow!

I'VE bided time in many a strange spot, but none more outlandish than this. The unfamiliar, Colombian undergrowth crawled over my flesh and Senor Ribalta poured his heavy, asthmatic, noisy breath into my ear. I wondered whether there were those vicious little poisonous snakes about or bugs or tarantulas—hell, I'm no landsman!

All the poisonous things in Colombia couldn't be more so than that Raffin, so Senor Ribalta laid out a plan by whispers and sign language. We'd remain here perfectly still, let Draco come and Raffin go into his violence; this time it would have two witnesses, you see, and so verify Culpepper's accusation.

Raffin's sudden rigidity in there gave us the tipoff; Draco was coming down the highway. Maybe he was a gentleman of immense honor but he looked just like any other Latin in the tropic heat to me, dragging his feet as though he'd done a day's work on deck and stood a night watch topside to boot.

Raffin greeted him with a startling bellow that fairly keeled the little man over, but he shook his head stubbornly and I saw that they knew each other well. Hot words flew. Raffin worked up a fury. He sprang. To me it looked as though he annihilated the man, but Ribalta held me back—we must witness an overt act. "He demands the letters," he explained. He needn't have whispered in that uproar. "Quiet!" he warned me. "Let him attack, all out, then we break in."

Attack! Raffin hauled off with a flowerpot and aimed it at Draco's head just as a scream like a lost soul split the air a few feet behind me. Ribalta cursed something about madre and dios and Raffin froze. In all his fury he had not actually struck the little man at all and now he'd been checked. Ribalta was fit to be tied. He grabbed at bushes, just missed somebody directly behind me. A figure catapulted headlong into that shack, yelping and taking on.

Raffin swung around, startled, wild-eyed. Draco saw his advantage, threw himself at him from behind and took on much the same as Culpepper was doing. Out from the melee came flying arms and legs and would you believe it? It was wee Draco who first emerged, cradling the flowerpot in his arms! Aha-ah, thought I.

With an exclamation of disgust, Senor Ribalta motioned me to come along in. We gave Draco another surprise. He and Ribalta bandied words, the latter turned swiftly on Raffin, and Draco and Culpepper went crooning into a far corner like both had gone crazy.

And what do you think? That flowerpot still had a flower in it, an orchid, and the damned thing was called "Dusky Maiden." Here was what Culpepper had come for, precisely as he had said. Mann had held first claim on it because he had carried on the negotiations for his employer, but once an orchid fancier discovers so rare a bloom, all's fair in the fight for it.

SO MANN and Culpepper hadn't been after the Lincoln letters? Only a mere flower? What a letdown for me! Senor Draco beamed, telling us how at long last he had developed his nearly black flower, and rich Americans had agents here to pay him for the thing with much, very much, gold.

I had to explain to Senor Ribalta the posey yarn. Was his face red! But he struck a pose, stiffened his upperlip and made plain that he would stand for no more foolishness from Raffin, Senor Draco or even myself. Obviously he had gotten his ideas from Mann's message to Draco. Cautiously it had refrained from mentioning the orchid outright, but it had contained an offer and made an appointment. To Ribalta, however, all this became synonymous with the Draco letters.

He worked on Draco, pleading, explaining, bullying until the flood of Spanish wilted the little man. Then, with eyes

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gleaming through sweat, Ribalta told me that Draco had come to realize his duty to his country regarding the letters, that times had changed greatly since his forebear had entrusted the sealed package to his care, that fifty years were a long time between nations. If they should fall into the hands of international trouble makers, those letters could—well, Draco had agreed that they should be burned as was, their contents a perpetual mystery.

IT WAS a dramatic moment. Ribalta freed from the Raffin menace, Draco making the noble gesture. If only we could have a burst of trumpets and a curtain to fall . . . but after the show, I had to go home to Bayle.

The dramatic atmosphere persisted while we piled into the car with Culpepper clutching that damned, blackish posey. And back again in the shop, Draco confessed that he'd hid the sealed package in "so cunning a place," as Ribalta translated it. We all were so happy by then, all save Raffin inventing an explanation of his failure to his sponsor. My original suggestion that the letters be burned for the good of both our countries was to be carried out.

Culpepper smirked my way and I smirked back.

Senor Draco hailed us into the shop to see his cunning, pried a wallboard loose and produced a package under a huge red seal. He spouted a speech in his Spanish, led us back into the rear room, poured coal oil onto the package in his stove. The flames ended it all. Grand and glorious, dramatic, final!

This was my exit. The sooner I faded, the better. I turned back in time to catch the mocking smile on Culpepper's mug. Aye, he got a kick out of this, shrewdly guessing that I wasn't so happy as I made out.

That smile of his really got me.

I asked Ribalta, therefore, to be my interpreter. "Si, si, senor." When he heard what I wanted him to say, he demurred; he didn't care to roil up Culpepper, he needed Culpepper's testimony to finish off Raffin. I brought the entire weight of my official (?) position as representative of the United States to bear. He clicked his heels instinctively. I had him.

"Senor Draco is a man of impeccable honor, senor?" I demanded.

"Si, si, senor!"

"Then he cannot sell his orchid to Culpepper at all," I produced a sheaf of Bayle's long green and announced myself as Harry Mann. Culpepper made one hell of a protest, of course, but I got the orchid. Immediately I paid the cash to Draco and turned Culpepper over to Ribalta for falsely impersonating Mr. Mann. Now Senor Ribalta really had his witness and Culpepper was so deeply involved that I knew he'd testify against Raffin, probably with certain embellishments.

So it was off again for me. At the airport, one passenger was snaked off the list, thanks to Senor Ribalta, and I got his seat, departing Colombia with a rummy plant in a pot. I wouldn't have planted the thing in my worst enemy's back yard and yet, for no reason at all, I yearned to present it in person to Harry Mann. I had to square myself with Culpepper.

I looked wistfully at the package as I handed it to Bayle. They'd sealed and double-sealed it after President Lincoln had died. Would Bayle take his own private look-see when alone with it?

As usual, he divined my thoughts. "I shall not break the seals. I do not indulge an undue curiosity regarding the contents and, unsealed they would lose their peculiar worth to me. But tell me, how the devil did you prevent Senor Draco from knowing that you had removed this from its wrappings? You must have broken the outside seal to do it, surely he would have observed that."

"Chewing gum," said I. "With gum I stuck the old seal down again. I was on pins and needles till he got the thing into his stove lest the gum give way, but he never suspected the move—or me. He was a man of honor and he could see that I too was a man of honor. Very naive, that Senor Draco. Otherwise he never would have dreamed that 'so cunning a hiding place' behind a board in the ramshackle wall could hoodwink a man like myself. I had spotted that hiding place inside two minutes."

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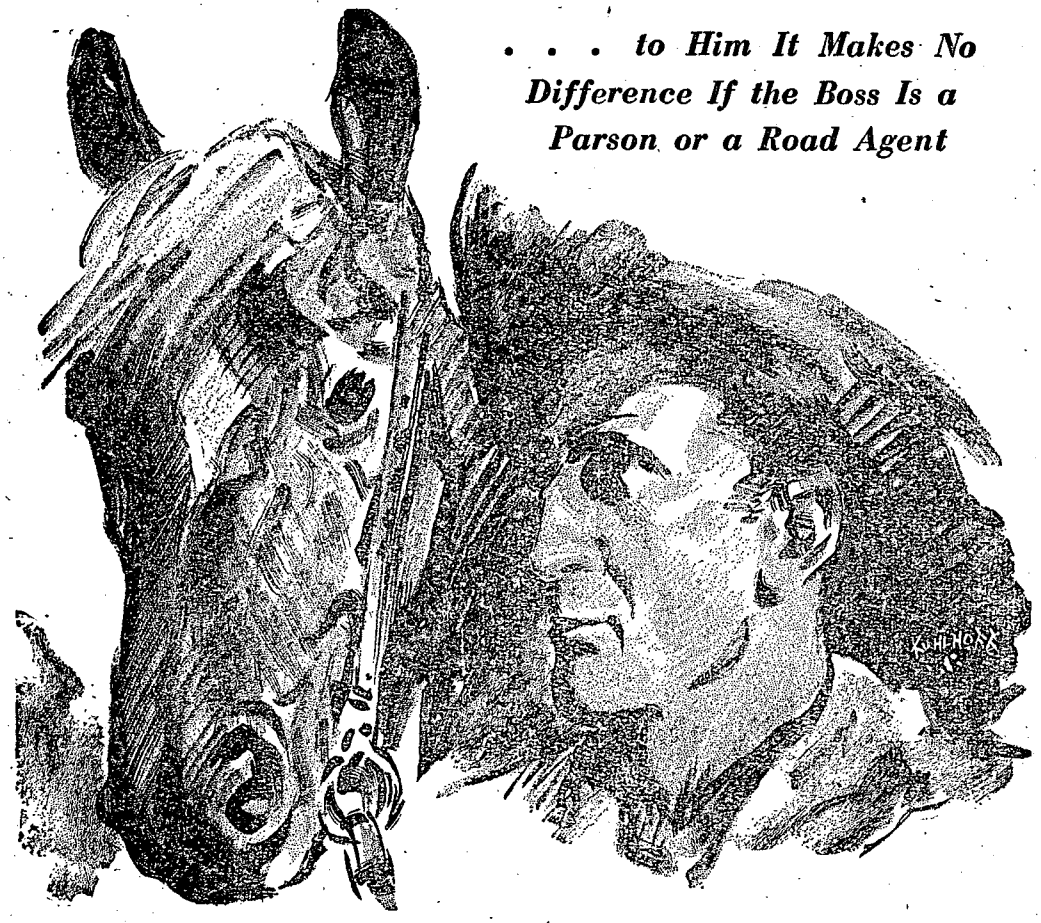
. . . to Him It Makes No Difference If the Boss Is a Parson or a Road Agent



A GUNMAN'S PARTNER

By CADDO CAMERON

FIRST time we met he didn't have any use for me and I couldn't blame him a particle. He was just a young fella then, hadn't been around much, and more'n likely he'd never run onto anything like me—six and a half foot tall with a dark hawk face, a lantern-jawed head and a reputation so loud it carried clean across ten states. The law and my enemies hung that reputation on me. Maybe I earned it, too. I ain't sayin'. Anyhow, I sure liked him and worked hard to make him like me regardless of my looks and reputation. It had taken me quite a spell to do it. Come a time, though, when he figured that I dealt 'em face up and straight across the board to my friends, and from then on he was my pardner. It made no difference to him whether I was a parson or a road agent.

As we racked along down the years we had some fun and a heap of trouble and we had it together, a fifty-fifty split all the way. We froze in the same cold, burned to the same thirst and ached to the same hunger. We tasted the same gunsmoke, too, but he always wanted to carry more'n his share of the load and there've been times when he risked his life to save mine. Everything he done he done right and when it come time for him to die, he died right. He's in The Happy Huntin' Grounds now and I hope he's packin' the riggin' of a better man than me. He deserves the best, Old Blaze does. He was my pardner, that big sorrel horse of mine, but he's dead now.

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And it happens like this:

Along towards noon we're a-joggin' south on The Chisholm up in the northwest corner of The Chickasaw Nation when all of a sudden I make up my mind to throw off the trail at Wild Horse Creek about five mile ahead and see can I catch me a bait of fish for supper. It's late in the season. We ain't meetin' any northbound herds, but we've overtaken and passed several Texas trail outfits a-headin' south with wagons and hands after makin' deliveries in Kansas or beyond, and I know that some of these wagons are a-packin' plenty hard money, for there's many a Texan cowman who won't have no truck with paper of any kind because of the counterfeit that's loose and a-rangin' wide in the South. Off and on, these outfits gets stuck up, too, no matter how much help they've got along.

They ain't got no call to be afraid of me, though. At heart I'll always be a cowman and I'd still be gentlin' broncs somewheres or ridin' in the dust of longhorns if it hadn't been for that time down in—Hell! Forget it! Once in a while I run onto somebody I know from down home and ride along with 'em for a spell simply because I'm hongry to talk cow and horse and Texas, and to tell the truth that's my only reason for ridin' south on The Old Chisholm Trail today. I ain't got no business here on account of the law and others that's a sight more dangerous than the law.

A WAGON is camped down Wild Horse Creek a little ways about where I'd figured to spread my blankets. Pretty soon I'm able to make out the brand burnt on its chuckbox — Cross X — and I'm powerful glad that wagon is there, for the owner of the outfit is one of the best friends I've got in Texas. Tom Sanders is his name and he's just gettin' a start in the cattle business for himself. He was cow foreman and trail boss for Drumm and Draper while I was a-ridin' for them, and that time when I didn't have sense enough to run from a certain bunch and stood up and shot it out with 'em and got the law on my tail, Tom swore that I done right and he's been thataway ever since. He's still doin' his damndest to get me squared up with Texas law and from what I hear, he's makin' a little headway, too.

A span of mules is staked in the bottom out there and four ponies under saddle are ground-hitched near the wagon. One man is on his back in the shade of a big hackberry, four more are settin' around and a colored cook is a-mixin' somethin' over by the fire. Everything is hunkydory, far's I can see. It's got to be second nature for me to look men and things over mighty close before I ride up to 'em, but this is once when I don't look close enough. One of the men stands up and the sun flashes off'n the badge on his vest! Too late to turn back now, though, and besides, I'm bound and determined to see Old Tom Sanders and wouldn't turn back nohow. I slip the thongs off my gun handles and make certain that they're a-slidin' easy in their leather.

It's Tom Sanders under the hackberry and from here he sure looks pale and peaked. I speak and the four men answer sorta low and distant like, and when I step off and drop reins near the other horses I see that Tom's eyes are shut and he ain't sayin' nothin'. The big fella with the badge has got yaller hair and white in his eye, and the badge says, "Deputy U. S. Marshal." A-standin' there with his thumbs hooked in his belt he sure is lookin' me over good as I amble toward them and his hard face tells me that he don't like anything much about me, which ain't at all surprisin' from a lawman.

"Howdy, boys," I says. "What's the matter with Tom?"

Sanders opens his eyes and rolls his head my way. "Slim!" His voice is mighty weak. "Glad to see you, boy. Wish you'd a got here last night." Tom shuts his eyes. "Tell him, fellas. He's my— Old Slim is my friend."

I look quick around at them. It's plain to see that the marshal and a chunky, black-headed cuss know me, but the other two don't first off.

Then one of 'em busts out, "Say! Are you Slim—?"

"Gunman," I cut in quick. "That's what folks call me now. My real name is buried in the Osage Hills. Let it stay there. Tell me about Tom."

"Sorry, Mister Gunman," says the young fella. "Tom talks a heap about you and it's all good. Set and I'll tell you how come he's crippled down.

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He introduces himself as Billy West and the other young fella as Mike Willis, both Cross X hands. The chunky man is Shorty Simpson, an Ellison rider who came up with a herd and stayed over in Kansas after his outfit went back to Texas. He threw in with the Cross X Wagon for company. Billy introduces the deputy marshal as Frank Warren.

"I know Gunman, even if he don't know me," says the marshal curt. "Tell him your story, Billy, and make it short. I want to ask him some questions."

This tough lawman don't look or sound noways good to me, but I keep my mouth shut. I'm worried about Tom Sanders.

Billy West goes on, "What with Tom and Big Jim, the cook, there's six of us Cross X men with the wagon and Shorty here makes seven. The balance of our outfit went to Kansas City and taken the cars to Denison. We camped here on Wild Horse early last night. On the way down yesterday evenin' Shorty was off a-scoutin' by hisself and run onto a bunch of buff'ler in Little Beaver bottoms west of here a piece, so we propositioned Tom to lay over so's we could go and get us a bait of hump ribs. He was all for it, allowed he'd stay with the wagon while we went a-huntin'. We left before light this mornin', didn't find nary a buff'ler, got back about ten and found Tom shot and the wagon robbed of thirty thousand gold. Two masked men done it an hour before sunup. Bob Jones and Chuck Wilson, the other Cross X boys have gone to Fort Sill to see can they get a doctor."

The deputy is holdin' his locoed eyes on me steady.

I ask Billy, "Is Tom hurt bad?"

"Slug high in his chest. Didn't nick his lung. A clean hole through and through. We patched him up best we could. Didn't want to move him for fear he'd bleed worse."

"What about the stickup? How was it pulled off?"

"Tom and Big Jim allow it was done plumb slick and easy by men who knew what to look for and where to find it. Tom and Jim were in the wagon a-grublin' for somethin'. The bandits walked from behind that there clump of bushes and throwed down on 'em. Tom figures they sneaked in there afoot and hid last night. The boss robber ordered Tom to fetch the nail keg out of the wagon. Tom told him to go to hell. He shot Tom. Then he made Big Jim fetch it to him and empty out the nails that was on top of the money. That's all there was to it. They taken the keg and went down the creek afoot. Left their horses a safe distance away, more'n likely."

"Any idea what the robbers looked like? Did they pack any personal brands or marks?"

"Like I told the marshal a little while ago," answers Billy, "one of 'em was a runt, but the boss bandit was a tall and ganglin' cuss. He wore two guns and done the shootin' with his left. Big Jim has got sharp eyes and he's a plumb smart boy. He thought the boss walked sorta slaunchwise and went and looked at his tracks and sure enough, his off foot points straight ahead, but his nigh boot turns out more'n average. We all seen that, too, when we got back."

Billy has described a man I know, but I do my damndest to hide the fact and don't say nothin'. Strikes me that the marshal's locoed eyes are showin' more white than ever.

Tom Saunders speaks up, husky and weak, "Only fifteen of the thirty thousand was mine, Slim. That's the hell of it. The balance belonged to some little outfits who turned in beeves to make up my trail herd. I didn't have enough— They're poor men, those fellas. They need their money bad and there ain't enough stuff left in my brands to pay 'em off. Slim, *that hurts*!"

Not a word about this robbery leavin' *him* flat busted so he'd have to start from taw again. What I mean—Tom Sanders is all man.

"You've talked a-plenty, Tom," I tell him. "Forget that money and see can you get some rest. Maybe I can do somethin'—maybe."

Marshal Frank Warren grins sarcastic. "What can *you* do?"

"Hard to tell," I answer easy. Then ask Billy West, "Who all knew about the money and where it was hid?"

"I reckon several fellas knew that Tom wouldn't take nothin' but hard cash," says Billy, "but us boys with the wagon were the only ones who knew where it was put."

I'm fixin' to ask Shorty Simpson a question, when trouble busts out among the

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horses. Blaze is standin' alongside of a snaky bay. Now, that sorrel of mine is a plumb sociable horse and from the side of my eye I see him reach over friendly to touch noses with his neighbor, then all of a sudden that bay flattens his ears and grabs him a mouthful of sorrel hide and his teeth pop when Blaze jerks a-loose. Quick as a flash my horse strikes with a front foot. He's shod and his iron leaves a mean gash from shoulder to knee. Marshal Warren is between me and the horses. He lets out a cuss and jumps and gives Blaze's reins a vicious jerk.

"Take care, marshal!" I bark. "He's a one-man horse and I'm that lucky man."

The words ain't hardly out of my mouth before Old Blaze lays back his ears, his head shoots out, his teeth snap and that deputy loses his vest and part of his shirt.

"Blaze!" I yell, and jump that way.

Meantime, Warren jerks his six-shooter. A split-second before he kills my horse, my fist catches him in the burr of the ear and he dives headforemost amongst the bay's legs.

He gets out safe and comes up quick, reachin' for the six-shooter that he dropped.

I sure ain't a-huntin' trouble with *him*, don't make a pass at my gun, just stand there with my arms folded. "Take it sorta easy, marshal. Leave that gun be until you cool off."

I'll never know what stops him. Warren is plumb bad if I know a badman when I see him, he's a fighter and he ain't afraid of me. Maybe he figures there ain't enough at stake to risk his life, or maybe this is another time when my reputation saves my hide. It makes me out to be a heap meaner with a six-shooter than I really am.

Anyhow, the deputy straightens up without his gun, and growls at me savage, "Where were *you* when this stickup come off? That's what I want to know!"

"Fair question, marshal," I answer. "I was camped on the Little Washita about two hundred yards west of the crossin'."

"Can you prove it?"

"Nope—nobody else there, but you can't prove that I wasn't."

"Where did you come from?" he demands.

"None of your damned business."

He goes red to his hair, growls, "What are you doin' on the trail?"

"None of your damned business."

The white in his eyes gives him the look of a locoed horse, and right now I figure he's mighty nigh as crazy. I watch him powerful close.

"Where are you goin'?" he barks.

"That's somethin' else that ain't none of your damned business, marshal," I tell him easy, "but I don't mind sayin' that I'm a-headin straight for the Wichitas because I figure to find Tom's money somewhere in those mountains."

MARSHAL WARREN teeters back and forth on heels and toes a-lookin' me over, and his eyes narrow thoughtful. "D'you know the man they described as the robber?"

I grin. "Even if I did, I'd never tell *you* who he is. If you know me like you said, you know that I never have no truck with the law. When I get stomped I don't ask no badge-toter to help me get square with the stomper. Anything else you'd like to know?"

"Huh!" he grunts. Turnin' to the others, he snaps, "I'm takin' the trail of the robbers. Be back sometime tonight. Don't leave here."

Without another glance at me, Frank Warren picks up his six-shooter and swings aboard the bay. He rides slow through the timber down Wild Horse Creek like he's a-readin' sign.

"How long has he been here?" I ask.

"He come about an hour before you did," answers Billy West. "Why?"

"Curiosity. Was he ahuntin' somebody, or did he say?"

"He allowed an LO wagon was stuck up a short piece this side of Fort Reno last night and he knew for a fact that the robbers were a-headin' south."

Shorty Simpson ain't said nothin' yet, but his sharp black eyes ain't missed a thing and he's a-listenin' close. I ask him, "Want to take a little ride with me, Simpson, just for company?"

For some reason that catches him off balance and he's flustered a-plenty. "Why—uh, no— That is, I'd better stay here with the boys until the others get back."

I walk over and tell Sanders, "Stop your frettin', Tom, and take care of yourself. I know a lot about a whole slew of people and

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places here in The Nations. Maybe I can find out somethin'. So 'long, fellas."

WHEN I climb onto Blaze and head west from the Cross X wagon, I don't aim to go that way any longer than it takes me to get out of sight. Sure, the Wichita Mountains are west, but I ain't goin' to the Wichitas. The man Billy described is Slew-foot Jones, an all-around badman, and I know that he's got a hideout down the Wild Horse about fifteen mile because I've been there. Slew Jones lifted a horse from me once and I trailed him to his den. We had some words and swapped a few licks before I got the horse back and I ain't seen him since. What I can't understand, though—he ain't big enough as badmen go to be bossin' a gang of his own, so it's a safe bet that somebody else is behind him and framed this stick-up for him.

After a while we come to a big thicket of blackjacks and take an animal trail into it, still goin' west, then circle south to the crest of a rise and halt. I get down and climb a tree with the little brass spyglass that has saved my hide more'n once. Somehow, I've got a feelin' that Marshal John Warren didn't go far down the Wild Horse. I'm suspicious of him and he's plumb suspicious of me, and I'll gamble that he stopped some place where he could keep an eye on me. Without the glass I see two riders comin' across open ground at a high lope hot on my trail, and with it I clearly make them out to be Marshal Warren and Shorty Simpson!

What the hell? Has that locoed marshal deputized Simpson, and who is Simpson? But I can't take time to argue with them now. My main job is to get Tom Sanders' money back for him and I don't aim to let a damned thing interfere with that job. Takin' a quick look south and east I see that the blackjacks will soon peter out in either direction and there's maybe fifteen miles of more or less open and rolling country on both sides of the thin belt of trees along Wild Horse before I'll strike the timber in which Slew-foot's hideout is buried, about five mile farther on. They're bound to spot me on the prairie when I leave these blackjacks and cut back east. No sense in makin' a run for the timber along the creek. They'll know which way I'm goin' and will simply stay in the open where they can travel faster and head me off. I've got to out-run the marshal and Simpson or give them the dodge until I can get to Slew-foot's and finish my business. After that—well, I ain't a-huntin' trouble, but I'll stop runnin'.

When it looks like they'll hit these blackjacks shortly before I'm leavin' them, I climb down and tell Old Blaze, "Here we go, boy. It's been quite a spell since we had a hard race, but we're in for it now. Glad you didn't drink too much when I watered you out back at the Wild Horse. That bay you busted has got plenty speed and Simpson's black looks fast. Let's go, fella!"

Funny how a lonesome man gets to talkin' to his horse. Funnier still how a smart, one-man horse seems to understand. Maybe it's just imagination. Maybe a lonesome fella likes to think that his horse understands. Or maybe a horse that always shoots square and wants to do everything right, pretends that he understands so's to make his pardner feel good. Maybe Old Blaze kids me thataway. I wouldn't put it past him. Anyhow, he listens close when I talk, and when I hit the saddle he's a-leavin' out from here like he knows that we've got to go far and fast.

I LET Blaze set his own pace through the blackjacks and when we reach open country he still does it. He knows we're in a hell of a hurry. He goes a little too fast at first, but I speak to him about it and he settles down into an easy stride that eats distance and, in a long run, will throw dirt in the face of any horse I ever seen. When we top out on a low ridge I show him the dark band of timber fifteen mile ahead and tell him that's where we're bound, and he swivels his little ears and I'll swear he understands.

We've got a mighty good head start before I look back from another ridge and see dust leavin' the blackjacks a-boilin' our way. Naturally, they spot our dust and they'll see us as we go up and down over this rollin' country. Let 'em look. Inside of another five miles they'll see us drawin' away from them like they were snubbed to a post with a three-quarter rope. With the feel of Old Blaze's great muscles a-rollin' smooth and powerful under me and his big heart a-poundin' regular and easy, and the wind a-whistlin' past my ears and a-pullin' at my

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hair, damned if I don't want to stand in my stirrups and sound the long yell. *Blaze, you're all horse!*

When we hit the timber I rein in to breathe my sorrel. We sure have left them behind, but they're boilin' along steady regardless. That's peculiar. By now they must know that they can't catch us. Then why don't they give up the chase? If they couldn't run onto us in open country, how do they expect to do it in timber? . . . Hold on a minute! Maybe they suspicion where we're a-headin'. Maybe that sharp-eyed marshal saw somethin' in my face that told him I knew the man Billy West described and now he calc'lates I'm bound for Slew-foot's place and he figures to round me up there. But, how come *he* knows where Slew-foot's hideout is? Maybe I don't know all I'd ought to know about John Warren—Well, anyhow, I won't waste no time a-foulin' my trail through the woods. If he has an idea where I'm goin' I'll be better off to go as fast as I can and hope that I get there in time to finish my business before he comes.

SLEW JONES has got him a dugout at a spring near the head of a timbered draw that prongs off from Wild Horse Creek. As hideouts go it wouldn't amount to much if it wasn't for the bands of mustang that water at the creek and travel the paths through the woods, which makes it mighty hard to trail a rider in here if he's on a barefooted pony. I'd never have run onto Slew that time if the horse he stole from me hadn't been a big animal and plated.

Old Blaze is wet and a-breathin' hard when we water a little at the creek, then walk easy into the small openin' at the spring. Two ponies are picketed under saddle nearby, but no men are in sight and I reckon they're in the dugout. Its door is open. A good breeze is a-rustlin' leaves overhead and I hope I get right close before they hear us so's to sorta surprise 'em and maybe keep them from cuttin' down on me from a distance with rifles. I'll bet my bottom dollar that Blaze feels the same way about it, for he's a-walkin' soft. But maybe that's imagination, too. I'm always imaginin' somethin' good about my long-horse. We get close, all right, and would've got closer if it hadn't been for that little old buckskin at the end of a stake-rope out yonder. He had to go and nicker at us.

Two men show up at the door quick. The tall, loose-jointed cuss with a horse face and squint eyes is Slew-foot Jones, but I don't recognize the ratty little devil behind him. They don't say or do nothin' and neither do I—just keep on a-walkin' my horse toward 'em. But I ain't as loose and easy in the saddle as I'm a-makin' out to be. This is where a little mistake could spoil everything and I'm one fella who can make his mistakes. I've got to find out where Slew has hid the Cross X money, if it *is* hid, and a shootin' scrape with these scalawags would be a poor way to go about it. Slew-foot ain't much on the shoot when it's gun-to-gun, but it's two-to-one now and he might take a chance. I speak and they answer plumb unsociable, then I swing Blaze so his off side is toward them and step down quick. In my country it's an insult to do that, but what I see in the little man's face tells me that he ain't half as much insulted as he is disappointed when I put seventeen hands of horse between us while leavin' the saddle.

I amble that way slow and gentle on my feet, and ask, "How they stackin', boys?"

Slew's quick eyes squint more'n ever. He spits, and answers short, "Just so-so, Gunman. What d'you want here?"

"Down yander a piece, an old blackjack limb lifted me clean out'n the saddle and damned nigh broke me in two," I say innocent. "Mind if I go in and stretch out on a bunk for a few minutes?"

Naturally, he can't refuse unless he wants to start a fight, so we go into the dugout and I lay down in a bunk and they set in the other'n across from me. Slew introduces his pardner as Slip Elm and I take a good look at the sharp-faced little outlaw who has made a name for himself as a slick thief and a dangerous killer, providin' your back is turned. Slip wouldn't ride for a two-bit crook like Slew-foot, which satisfies me that they're both a-workin' for somebody else.

IT'S plain to see that they're uneasy and upset about me comin' here and I ain't none too comfortable myself. In this little old dugout there ain't many places to hide thirty thousand gold, but it would take a heap of time to look in all of them and I

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ain't got much time. Warren and Simpson are on good horses and they're a-burnin' the breeze. Layin' here a-lookin' at these outlaws I realize only too damned well that this is once when brains rather than bullets will make the winnin' hand, but the hell of it is—me, I'm better off to gamble on a pair of sixes than I am to draw to what few brains I've got.

While they're both eyein' me suspicious, Slew wants to know, "Wasn't you ridin' at a right lively clip to get plucked off by a limb?"

"Shore was." I pretend to be close mouthed.

"You must've had a powerful good reason for ridin' fast through timber."

"Shore did."

"Comin' to see me about somethin'?"

"Nope."

"Goin' somewheres else in a hurry?"

"Yep."

Slew-foot is plumb curious now, and he ain't got no better sense than to ask, "Why?"

I set up slow and painful. "That ain't none of your business, Slew, but you'll hear about it anyhow so I might as well tell you that I've got a posse on my tail—that is, a U. S. Deputy and two of his prisoner guards."

They're all ears now, excited and mighty hostile towards me for pointin' a posse their way. I'm a-watchin' Slew powerful close. Like a flash his squint eyes dart to somethin' under the foot of my bunk, then wander around the room and back to me. Slip's gaze is fixed on me and it don't never shift a particle. Reminds me of a wounded hydrophobia cat backed into a corner. Keepin' these jaspers in the side of my eye, it's easy for me to bend down and fiddle with my spur leather and look to see what was the first thing Slew-foot thought about when I mentioned the posse. I don't see nothin' right off. Soon afterwards, though, I notice that the hard-packed clay floor under the outside corner post that holds up the foot of my bunk has lately been tamped down by a boot sole, a slick job of work, too, with old dirt smoothed over it, but there's a few peg marks in sight and somebody accidentally let a heel touch where he couldn't have got his foot with the bunk in place. Maybe this ain't the spot, but it's a good gamble and I'm in a fix where I've got to gamble some.

Slew is askin' questions while tryin' to make up his mind about somethin', "What marshal is after you?"

"Heck Henderson and he's bad."

"Damned bad!" growls Slew. "What's he got on you?"

"Nothin'," I snap. "But a Cross X wagon was robbed this mornin' and I wasn't far away when it happened, so he lights out after me."

Slew-foot Jones looks thoughtful at the spot underneath my bunk like he's still tryin' to make up his mind. It's plain to see that Slip Elm don't have to make up *his* mind, and what I mean—he's poison. In a situation like this I aim to let the other fella show his hand if he will, but time is a-slidin' by mighty fast and I've got one ear cocked for the poundin' of hoofs outside, just waitin' for it and a-hopin' I don't hear it. So as to get some action quick, maybe I'd better give 'em a chance to make their play.

I groan and lay back slow, settlin' down in the bunk on my right arm and shoulder. That does it. Slip Elm thinks he's got me. He goes for his gun. He ain't overly fast and there's somethin' he don't know. He don't know about the hours of practice I've put in a-drawin' with first one hand, then my other while stretched out like this, figurin' there'll come a time when I'm caught asleep on my side or crippled down.

As I was sayin', Slip ain't fast. He's a-gawkin' at the muzzle of my six-shooter, while I tell him, "Hold 'er! That's it. Now h'ist 'em, both of you! Higher, Slip! You penny-ante gunslingers ain't got no business in The Nations. You'd better hit for The States where folks are civilized, and go to packin' shotguns. On your faces in the bunk while I tie you. Make 'aste!"

They're de-salted complete and don't offer to make me a fight. In no time at all I'm at work on the loose dirt under the leg of my bunk.

A foot down I strike the nail keg, pull out a handful of old rags and there's the Cross X money!

I'm lookin' around for a sack to put the gold in so's to carry it easier, when all of a sudden Old Blaze stamps a foot, tongues his bit noisy and blows soft!

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IT'S Warren and Simpson. Standin' back and loookin' past the side of the door I watch them ride up slow and easy like I tried to do and I'm sorta wonderin' what it is that keeps me from cuttin' 'em down now instead of waitin' for them to fetch me a fight. I'm certain they'd shoot me down thataway. I'm an outlaw and outlaws do such things. But I reckon there's *some* things that *some* outlaws won't do, no matter how cussed they may be when the chips are down and it's man-to-man in the open.

Speakin' cautious, I turn and ask, "D'you know John Warren? Talk low or I'll buffalo you with a gunbarrel."

"Why, shore, I know him," answers Slewfoot. "He's all right and—"

"Shut up!" snaps Slip.

I can't get another word out of them.

Old Blaze has recognized his enemies—that bay and the man on its back. I can tell from the way he's behavin' now. His weight is on all four feet, his small head is high and his neck is bowed so that rolls of muscle show beneath the foam that has dried on his skin. Little puffs of breeze are a-playin' tag in his mane and tail. Standin' that way he's the prettiest thing in this world and fit to make a horseman's heart jump. His muzzle is like soft brown velvet, the white in his blaze is *white,* his eyes are big and smart, and his nostrils are wide and sensitive like an Arabian's. They're flared now and I can see tremors in them. He steals a quick glance at the door of the dugout. He spots me, Old Blaze does. His quick ears twitch my way, he tosses his head and tongues his bit impatient.

My horse is doin' his damndest to tell me, "Looky yander, pardner! Trouble a-comin' and it's time we done somethin' about it."

Maybe that's only imagination, too. But when a man has got the prettiest and smartest horse in the world you can't blame him for imaginin' things like that.

Wish to God I'd taken his advice!

But I wait for Warren and Shorty to come closer. I want to see if I can't get the drop on them when they go to step off and maybe avoid a shootin' scrape. Gunplay with that cold-eyed marshal means a killin'. Blaze is standin' all of forty feet from the door. Warren rides up to him and halts with Shorty close behind and a little to the left. My sorrel don't make a hostile move, but I watch muscles tighten under his hide and his ears freeze at a dangerous angle—back a little ways. Damn that Warren! Lookin' hard at the dugout he sets his saddle like he don't never aim to get down. If I show myself now, though, we'll have to shoot it out.

Why didn't I, regardless?

Out of a clear sky the marshal's bay squeals and makes a slash at Blaze with its teeth. My horse rears and strikes with his forefeet. Warren's gun explodes at the top of his holster. Gunsmoke envelopes my sorrel's head and neck, the bay's, too, and the marshal himself. All this happens in a twinklin', but I had plenty of time to have blasted him out of the saddle before he fired. Couldn't do *that,* though. I'm still under cover and I ain't a bushwhacker. A split second later I land outside. Blaze staggers back. Blood spurts from a hole in his throat. Too my dyin' day I'll swear that he looked around for me and his big eyes met mine!

Why not? I'm his pardner and he needs me.

What follows won't never be quite clear to me. I seen it all through a red haze that blurred my sight. In gunsmoke that swirled over and around us I see my horse with head thrust out at the end of his neck, teeth bared and ears laid flat, gatherin' his last strength for his last fight. I see him plunge and literally hurl himself on top of the bay and the man on its back. My six-shooter is jumpin' in my hand and gunfire is a-crashin' in my ears. I'm hit twice, neither a cripplin' shot. I empty one gun and shift to my other'n without knowin' that I done it.

When it's all over, Simpson is dead. The bay is down with a busted shoulder. John Warren, the bogus marshal, lies half beneath it. He's dead, too—four bullets and a crushed skull. Old Blaze fell on top of them. My pardner has made his last fight.

Hope he knows that I done the best I could for him.

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"You Should Never Brag about Murder; You Never Know Who Might Be Listening . . . ."

MURDER TALKS OUT LOUD

By NEIL MARTIN

HENRY POU'S underlip was outthrust in a pout of annoyance as he looked down at the body of the old Negro on the rickety bed. Calling him to investigate what appeared to be a clear case of death from natural causes was like asking an expert poker hand to play tiddlywinks. Naturally his professional pride was ruffled.

Toying with his imposing handlebar mustache, Henry stared at the body, a spark of curiosity starting to life in his active brain. Clad only in a dingy red dressing gown crudely embellished with the signs of the Zodiac, old Papa Tou-tou lay in a relaxed pose which might have been mistaken for slumber were it not for the expression of mingled fear and agony frozen on his wrinkled, brown face.

Turning, Henry looked at the young Negress who sat on the sagging doorstep with her apron over her head. "It wasn't necessary to call the police, Seraphine," he said. "Any doctor will certify that Papa Tou-tou probably had a nightmare and died in his sleep."

"*Mais non*," the woman protested, her voice muffled by her apron. "The old one could never die by ordinary means. His *ouanga* kept away all sickness and misfortune."

Henry looked at the tall, lanky mulatto who stood just inside the door and declared in Cajan English, "Looks lak' his *ouanga*, she wasn't working this tam'. He was jus' lak' this when you fin' him, Gustave?"

"Thass right, Cap'n Henry, suh," the yellow man confirmed. "I ketched me a bunch o' cats in the bya early this mo'nin', an' has Seraphine fry up a mess for' the ol' man. When I comes in, I sees him lyin' jus' lak' he's lyin' now. When I sees he's daid, him, I runs down to the cannery office an' calls you on the phone."

Henry looked at a platter of catfish, fried to a golden brown, standing on a small table beside the door, flanked by a pitcher of cof-

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fee and a square of corn bread. Lifting the platter of fish, he touched its under side with the back of his left hand. It was still warm.

He stepped back to the bed and peered down at the body, noticing for the first time that the right ear was plugged with a tiny pellet of paper.

"Obviously," he murmured in French, "his *ouanga* wasn't proof against ear-ache. *Mais non.*"

Using a match, he pried the little wad of paper from the auditory passage. It came away, its under side clotted with the partly congealed blood which filled the orifice. He probed with the match stick, withdrew it and stared at it in growing awareness.

"Interesting—very," he murmured. He looked up at Gustave and ordered curtly, "Boy, you push yo' feet back to the cannery office and call Doc Couriere. Tell him I want Wilkes' daid wagon, too. Now git going."

As the man hurried away, Henry looked over the room for some sign of a struggle. There was none. Nevertheless, he knew that someone had thrown Papa Tou-tou down on his corn-shuck mattress, inserted a slender, pointed instrument—possibly an ice pick—into the old man's right ear and had driven it into his brain. When satisfied that his victim was dead, the killer had withdrawn the murder tool, plugged the auditory passage, to prevent a possible effusion of blood, and had then rearranged the bed and composed the body, thus removing all indications of the struggle which Henry realized must have taken place.

"*Ma foi!*" he muttered. "This is one attempt to keep murder quiet." He added in English, "Instead of being quiet, this killing, she talks right out loud. By damn, yes!"

HE STOOD in the middle of the little room and stroked his sweeping mustache while he stared reflectively at the rough, board floor. In height, Henry was barely five feet three. But Nature had compensated for his lack of altitude by giving him shoulders as wide as a barn door and a chest like that of a shorthorn bull. Standing there, a short, compact figure in summer police uniform, a gleaming Sam Browne belt slanting across his barrel chest and supporting a holstered .45 at his right hip, his fawn-colored ten-gallon hat shading his blunt-featured face, he suggested a contemplative walrus standing erect on its tail.

He sat down on a rickety chair and looked over the room, trying to think of a possible motive for the grisly murder of the old voodoo man. His knowledge of Negro psychology warned him that the old man had not been done to death by a member of his own race. Negroes, he realized, acted upon impulse, without premeditation. If one of them had killed Papa Tou-tou, the murder instrument would, more than likely, have been a billet of chinaberry wood from the box beneath the rusty stove. But this was no spur-of-the-moment killing. On the contrary, it had all the earmarks of a job carefully planned and skilfully executed.

Everything about the crime indicated that it had been committed by a white person. Henry knew that voodoo wasn't confined to colored people. He smiled cynically as he recalled the names of a number of whites who never made a move without first consulting the old man. All of which, he realized, wasn't going to simplify matters.

Against the wall, facing the door, stood a small table covered with a sleazy black cloth inscribed with cabalistic figures, crudely executed in bright yellow paint. Surmounting the table, coiled as if about to strike, was a badly stuffed snake of a species unknown to Henry. From within the circle of the scaly coils, the skull of a goat with enormous curving horns, looked back at him with a toothy leer.

Overhead, bundles of dried herbs hung from the dusty rafters. Along the rear wall were shelves containing rows of glass jars packed with dried roots, or filled with what appeared to be ordinary dust. Grinning at the array of voodoo trappings, he rose and stepped to the table. He lifted the goat's skull, turned it over in his hand and drew from within the grisly relic a large roll of bills secured with several turns of cotton twine.

"Voodoo seems to pay," he remarked, riffling the edges of the bills, some of which were old yellow-backs of one hundred dollar denomination. "Obviously," Henry continued, "Papa Tou-tou never heard of the New Deal. Anyway, this indicates that robbery wasn't the motive."

He pocketed the roll of money and

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stepped outside. Keeping his eyes on the ground, he circled the little shack, which huddled in the shade of a spreading china-berry tree. He paused at the garden patch to pry among the collards and the turnips and the bright, green shoots of new corn, all in hope that the killer, in flight, might have thrown away the murder instrument.

DISAPPOINTED, he returned to the front of the little building and looked across Bayou Papillon toward St. Odile drowsing in the early morning sunshine. Spring was in the air, and the deep delta country was wearing a new dress of tender green. Far down the bayou a line of shrimping luggers was heading up-stream toward the cannery. Overhead, flocks of geese and ducks wove geometric patterns against the blue as they winged from their winter feeding grounds and started on the first leg of their long journey up the great Mississippi flying toward their nesting places in the far north.

Henry turned to re-enter the house, pausing when he saw a small, black boy of ten standing beside Seraphine. Knowing that Negro children were not obsessed by the secretiveness of their elders, Henry crooked a forefinger at the youngster and favored him with a conspiratorial wink. As the boy came hesitantly forward, Henry inquired in a whisper:

"You know who was come to visit wit' Papa Tou-tou yesterday, yes?"

The boy squirmed and dug brown toes in the dust. "They wa'nt nobuddy but that white gemman," he mumbled.

"Ah! A w'ite gentleman, yes?" Henry beamed at the youngster, dug into his trousers pocket and came up with a four-bit piece. "W'ich wan was that?"

The youngster's eyes brightened as he looked at the coin in Henry's hand. He said, "The one wid the li'l bity mustache." He thought for a second or two and added, "Had him on a blue suit wid li'l w'ite stripes."

"Hokay." Henry handed him the coin. "We done made us a start."

All he had to do now, he told himself, was to watch out for a white man with a little mustache and a blue pin-stripe suit. Glancing toward the cannery, he saw Gustave returning, accompanied by a sizeable crowd. Stationing himself at the door, he held the crowd off until Dr. Couriere arrived in his little black coupe.

The examination was soon completed. After a long study of the dead man's right ear, the deputy coroner declared:

"It's murder, all right. But I can't understand why anyone should want to kill this harmless old faker."

"Mebbe thass w'y he was murder'," Henry suggested. "He might have pull' wan fake too many. Mebbe he was working a shakedown racket, him." He pulled the roll of money from his pocket and handed it to the doctor. "Obviously, his racket paid well. Yes."

Sitting on the edge of the rickety bed, the doctor counted the money. "Six thousand dollars," he declared. "His racket must have been good, all right." He dropped the roll in the side pocket of his black alpaca coat and turned to Seraphine. "You his daughter?"

The woman shook her head. "He was ma gran'pere," she told him. "They hain't nobody but jes' the two of us, 'ceptin' Gustave. He's ma man."

"You're his sole heir, then," Couriere said. "After the inquest, you can put in a claim for this money. Cap'n Henry will tell you how to go about it." Turning to Henry, he added, "Inquest at three. Usual place." He went out, climbed behind the wheel of his coupe and drove away."

HENRY sat beside Seraphine and Gustave on the doorstep and waited for the dead wagon. After it had departed with the body, he and the mulatto nailed shut the doors and windows of the little house. Then Henry boarded his ancient jalopy and drove back across the drawbridge to the town hall.

He was unlocking the green door marked "Police Headquarters," when two men and a woman came around the corner of the building from Main Street, one of them hobbling with the aid of a cane. The woman wore a coarse apron over a cotton dress, had a white cloth bound turban-wise over her hair, and carried in her hand a one-gallon lard pail, all of which helped Henry to identify her as a cannery worker.

Halting, the woman glanced at the sign on the door and then declared:

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"I'm looking for the police."

Henry swept off his hat and bowed. "At yo' service, Madame. W'at can I do fo' you?"

"That old colored man who lives across the bayou—the one they call Papa Tou-tou—" she declared in a high-pitched nasal voice, "has been bothering us. We want him stopped."

Henry regarded for nearly a moment with a wondering stare, intrigued by her voice, which had all the musical qualities of a stone being rattled in a rusty can. Physically, she was not unattractive, although her blue eyes were tired and there was a hopeless droop to her otherwise good-humored mouth, while her hands were red and puffy from too much immersion in icy water. He estimated her age at twenty-five.

"So?" he drawled. "That ol' black rascal, he was pester y'all? Less go inside and talk about it."

He ushered them inside, placed chairs for them, then went behind his battered desk and seated himself in his creaky swivel chair. Removing his hat, he rested his elbows on the blotter and assumed a judicial pose.

"Hokay, Madame," he encouraged, "jus' go right ahaid and tell me about how that ol' wan is pestering you."

She turned to the man with the cane and said, "You tell him, Bert."

"The name's Woodlen," the man declared in a twanging drawl that sounded "foreign" to Henry. "About six weeks ago we bought that house at 411 Roosevelt Road, when it was put up for the taxes." He paused.

Henry waited for him to continue. Bert Woodlen was about thirty, a tall, spare man, with a prominent nose and chin, and with gray eyes in which Henry read the quiet desperation of an active man faced with a life of semi-invalidism.

"We got a quit-claim deed from the surviving heir," the young woman took up the story. "Lawyer Dupre handled the matter for us. Now somebody is trying to run us out."

Henry's shoulders came level with his ears in a deprecatory shrug.

"But no, Madame," he protested, "nobody can do lak' that to you."

"That's what you think," she replied tartly. "Listen, last Friday a man came and offered to buy us out. Claimed the heir who'd given us our quit-claim deed had changed his mind and wanted the house back. I told him we weren't selling out, and he got real nasty and threatened to take us into court. I told him to get out. Then I called up Lawyer Dupre and told him about what had happened. He advised me to forget the matter, unless the man bothered me again.

"Then someone called us on the phone Sunday morning and warned us to get out—or else. He didn't say what he meant by the 'or else.' But it made me worry plenty. Then Bert went to get our mail from the box on our front porch this morning and found these."

She lifted a napkin wadded inside her measuring pail and brought forth two tiny human figures, one dressed as a woman. Placing them on the blotter in front of Henry, she added a grimy card.

Henry picked up the card. Holding it between finger and thumb, he studied with the air of a connoisseur the crudely drawn skull and crossbones inscribed in red ink above the words: "Git out or die."

He pursed his lips judicially, tempted for a moment to calm her fears by informing her of the old man's death, until he realized that the murder of the voodoo man could be only the beginning of a sordid scheme to gain possession of the Woodlen house.

"How you know ol' Papa Tou-tou, he was put a *gris-gris* on yo' house?" he asked.

Mrs. Woodlen glanced hesitantly at the second man and said, "Mr. Tanner suggested that he might be back of it."

Henry swivelled his chair around and looked questioningly at Tanner, who was about thirty-five, of medium height, with a puffy, white face and a bulging waistline. He was dressed in a lightweight gray suit, light blue shirt and dark blue cravat, and held balanced on his right knee a gray, snap-brim felt hat. On the floor at his feet was a brief case so obviously new that it filled the small basement room with the pungent odor of fresh leather.

"I don't ever remember seeing you around town," Henry said.

"I've been in and out a number of times," Tanner said. "I'm in the contracting busi-

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ness, with headquarters in New Orleans. I got in town on the seven-thirty bus this morning, and took breakfast at Madame Lafarge's boarding house. That's where I first heard about the old wanga man."

"He was passing by the house, and stopped to talk to Bert about a job of remodeling," Mrs. Woodlen put in. "Land sakes! We're too poor to think of doing anything to improve the place at this time. Anyway, Bert pulled those things out of the mail box."

Tanner nodded. "I saw what they were right away," he offered. "You know, that sort of thing is prevalent in some quarters of New Orleans. Anyway, I advised Mr. Woodlen to get the law after the old wanga man."

Henry nodded slowly; Tanner's explanation sounded reasonable. Turning to Mrs. Woodlen, he asked, "W'ere you folks come from, anyway?"

"Ioway," she twanged. "We came down here to escape the cold winters, and decided to stay because the good artesian water seems to help Bert's arthritis. Getting the title to our place cleared up took about all we had. So I went to work in the cannery, picking shrimp. But I'm satisfied, if folks will only leave us alone."

Henry studied her tired face, his eyes softening as he realized that only a woman who truly loved her man would be content to slave at the cannery processing tables. Touched to the core of his romantic Cajan soul, he murmured:

"Que c'est beau!"

She eyed him defensively. "Beg pardon?"

Henry beamed. "I was jus' thinking out loud, me," he apologized. He looked pointedly at the service discharge emblem in Woodlen's lapel and asked, "How come the government, she don't pay you a pension?"

Woodlen smiled ruefully. "Uncle Whiskers doesn't pay off for something that happens to a guy when he's a year and a half out of uniform," he explained.

HENRY leaned back in his chair and put the tips of his fingers together. "Somebody," he declared slowly, "is trying to get y'all out of that house on Roosevelt Road, fo' reasons bes' known to himself. You remember w'at that wan was lak'?"

"He had dark hair and eyes," Bert Woodlen declared. "Medium-sized guy. Wore a blue pin-stripe suit."

"Ha!" Henry's chair squeaked protestingly as he heaved himself upright. "And he had him a leetle mustache, that wan, yes?"

"That's right," Mrs. Woodlen twanged. "And he had a scar on the second knuckle of his left hand."

"Like he'd busted someone in the mouth and cut his knuckles on the other guy's teeth," Woodlen suggested.

Henry sagged back in his chair. "So? He's the same wan, yes? Hokay. They ain't no needcessity fo' y'all worrying any mo' about that wan. He won't come back. If he does, he'll fin' himself slammed in jail so hard he will stick to the back wall. And Papa Tou-tou, he's daid, him."

"When did he die?" Mrs. Woodlen asked.

"The debbity coroner, he figures it was some tam' las' evening, between six and nine o'clock," Henry explained. "Seems lak' that feller wit' the leetle mustache, he hires the ol' wan to mak' them *gris-gris* dolls, thinking he can scare y'all into selling out. But he gets scare' Papa Tou-tou may talk. So he sticks him an icepick in the ol' man's ear and bears down hard."

The young woman shuddered. "How awful!"

Henry nodded. "He's plenty daid, that Papa Tou-tou." He looked at Tanner, whose pasty face was stretched in a broad grin. "Ha! You jus' think of something fonny, yes?"

Tanner's grin faded, and his puffy lids closed down over his milky blue eyes. "No offense, Chief," he apologized. "I just happened to see what a spot the old wanga man's murder puts these folks in."

"So?" Henry's frown deepened. "Meestaire, if I need advice, I'll write you a letter. Hokay?"

Tanner grinned sheepishly. "Seems like I shot off my big mouth before I realized what I was saying. Excuse it, please!"

Henry shrugged. Turning to Bert Woodlen, he suggested, "Reckon y'all can jus' fo'get about that wan. He won't come back, him."

"I hope so, Chief," Woodlen said. He rose and leaned on his cane. "Just the same,

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I'll be keeping my gun handy. Let's go, Mattie."

She rose, smiled at Henry and followed her husband from the room. As they passed through the doorway, Tanner said:

"Why in hell should anyone want to get these poor devils out of their little old house?"

"Me," Henry drawled, "I would lak' to know that, too." Rising, he opened the safe, lifted out a big leather-bound ledger and laid it on the desk. Opening it at the indentation marked "S", he ran a finger down the column of names, his eyes thoughtful. Presently, he closed the ledger, replaced it in the safe and returned to his chair.

"I thought there was something familiar about that number," he said. "That property was part of the old deJoinville estate, which was divide' among the heirs years ago. All but wan of the heirs sol' out their shares and move away. That wan stayed on here, selling off wan piece of property after another, ontil only the house at 411 Roosevelt Road remain.

"Finally it, too, was sold, to an elderly couple name' Seeger. That was back in '38. They bought on terms, paying so much down and giving a mo'tgage on the balance. They lived there ontil '41, keeping to themselves, and making no frien's. Then wan day they drove off in their car and didn't come back."

Tanner gaped. "What happened to 'em?"

Henry shrugged. "Who knows. They aimed to come back, all right, fo' their fu'niture and mos' of their clothes was still in the house. But because they made no frien's, nobody bothered about their absence. Anyway, their house stood empty fo' nearly two years. The holder of the mo'tgage tried to get in touch wit' 'em. But at las' he was oblige' to fo'close, taking the furnishings to satisfy the deficiency clause in the mo't-gage.

"He tried to sell the house again, but nobody would buy, because the place got the name of being hoodooed. Finally, he moved to the city, abandoning the place, refusing even to pay the taxes, so that the municipality and the parish had to tak' over and sell the place fo' the back taxes at the annual tax sale las' February. That was when the Woodlens bought it."

"Is their title any good?" Tanner asked.

"If Lawyer Dupre says it's good," Henry drawled, "then it mus' be hokay."

Tanner lifted his brief case from the floor and stood up. "Hell of a note," he growled indignantly, "when poor people like these aren't let live in peace. It's bad enough to be poor, without being hounded out of their home. I hope you soon land that creep who tried to put the *gree-gree* on them."

Henry smiled without enthusiasm. "Lak' the feller says, I am keeping ma eyes open. Yes."

"More power to you!" Tanner approved. He glanced at his wrist-watch. "About bus time, and I have an appointment with a prospect in Sellierville at one o'clock. Well, so long, Chief! It's been nice meeting you." He put on his hat and left.

HENRY went outside and sat on the bench beside the door and watched Tanner move with a heavy-footed stride down Main Street toward the bus stop in front of Brossin's drug store. Tanner, he reflected, was like one of those minor characters in a play, whose part consists of making an entrance, speaking a line or two and then making an exit, after which he is seen no more during the performance. Tanner had made his entrance just as Bert Woodlen had discovered the *gris-gris* figurines in his mail box. He had spoken his lines and was now making his exit, leaving in Henry's mind a shadow of doubt.

Henry wanted to believe that the Woodlens were innocent victims of circumstance. But he had been taken in so often by phonies that he no longer accepted people at face value. Besides, Tanner's blunt statement that the murder of Papa Tou-tou had put the young couple on a spot had him worried, and he began to wonder if the man in the blue pin-stripe suit were merely a plant.

Henry shrugged hopelessly. "*Ma foi!*" he mused. "One could start at the L. and N. depot in New Orleans, and walk up Canal to Rampart Street and meet at least a hundred men answering that one's description. *Nom d'un tortue!* Unless that one walks right into my arms, this case may never be solved."

When Henry arrived at headquarters the following morning, he found a small group of curious citizens standing out-

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side the green door. Elbowing his way across the threshold, he looked at the three people sitting before the desk, then turned abruptly and closed the panel in the faces of the little crowd.

"Ma foi!" He addressed himself in French to his assistant, Jimmy Bourdelon, who sat behind the desk. "What goes here?"

The ex-marine who formed the night detail of St. Odile's two-man police force, snickered, which was about the closest he ever came to laughing.

"More monkeyshines at 411," he declared in English.

Henry stared questioningly at Bert and Mattie Woodlen, who were dressed in their Sunday best, and sat primly in their chairs at Jimmy's right. The man who sat beside them was a total stranger, who perched on the edge of his chair as if he were about to jump up and start running. A black derby hat of impressive respectability was set with mathematical precision on his large, globular head. But what interested Henry most was the fact that he wore a blue pin-stripe suit.

Henry pulled up a chair and sat down facing his assistant. "Hokay. Less have it."

Jimmy waved a slim, brown hand to indicate the Woodlens. "These folks went to a movie in Sellierville last night," he explained. "They missed the last bus south, and had to stay over for the night. When they got home on the six o'clock bus this morning, they found their house in disorder, with the bricks torn out of the back of the living room fireplace." Indicating the stranger, he continued, "This character was lying on the living room floor, tied hand and foot with a clothesline and gagged with a dishrag. The lady phoned me. I went over there, saw what had happened and brought all hands in."

"So?" Henry looked casually at the stranger, who seemed to be about forty-five, with a short, dumpy figure showing the roly-poly contours of a well-fed middle age. His broad face was the color of a ripe beet, and was embellished with short, thick eyebrows, a short, pert nose and a chin like a clenched fist. "You better start talking, ma frien'," Henry suggested.

"I can explain everything, Chief," the stranger declared nonchalantly. Rising, he dipped into his upper right vest pocket and produced a business card. "I am Mr. Monahan, private op. My card, sir." He handed Henry the little square of pasteboard, bowed to Mattie Woodlen and sat down again.

Henry glowered at the card, which read:

"J. Cyril Monahan
Private Investigations
1274 Coverly Building, St. Louis, Mo."

Henry stuck out his underlip in a pout. He distrusted private detectives on general principles, regarding them as mere snipers in the never-ending war against crime.

"How come you are operating in ma *ville* wit'out ma hokay?" he demanded.

Mr. Monahan's wide, thin-lipped mouth stretched in a placating grin which revealed teeth too white and even to be convincing. He said, "I intended to drop in on your this morning. But I got in town late last evening, and went right at the job. You see, I specialize in insurance cases—"

"Jus' skip that part," Henry interrupted. "I want to know how come you were in those folks' house."

"I was coming to that," Mr. Monahan explained affably. "You see, I'm investigating a couple who once lived at 411 Roosevelt Road. When I got off the bus, I inquired in the drug store and learned that the place was only a few blocks away. So I went right out there, intending to get my job done and catch the next bus back to Sellierville.

"I found the house, all right. I walked up on the front porch and pushed the bell button. There were no lights on inside. But I could hear someone moving around. After a while, a man came to the door. I told him my business, and he invited me inside. As I crossed the threshold, I removed my hat, while he closed the door behind me. That is the last I remember, until I came to later and found myself tied hand and foot, and my mouth crammed full of stinking dishrag."

"Well!" Mattie Woodlen gasped. "Mister, I'll have you know that my dishrags don't stink."

Mr. Monahan rose, removed his derby hat and bowed, revealing an expanse of glistening, pink baldness bordered on three sides by a semi-circular hedge of wiry, black hair. In the exact center of the bald spot

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was a blue-black swelling that suggested a ripe plum resting on a mound of strawberry ice cream.

"My dear madam," Mr. Monahan said apologetically, "perhaps I exaggerated when I said your dishrag stank. However, I assure you that the one in question had an aggravated case of B. O. Also, it tasted vilely of shrimp." He made a face and sat down again.

There was a fighting gleam in Mattie Woodlen's blue eyes as she turned to Henry. "Are you going to let him get away with that?"

"Now, Mattie," Bert Woodlen soothed, "you can see the man's telling the truth. Not about the dishrag, of course," he amended hastily. "But it's a cinch he didn't knock himself out and tie himself up, like he was when we found him."

Mattie Woodlen sniffed. "My nice fireplace—ruined! Land sakes! It was the nicest thing about the whole house. I'll never be able to earn enough money to have it fixed."

Henry was tempted to offer to have the fireplace repaired. But he sensed instinctively that Mattie Woodlen would be unwilling to accept favors. He looked at Jimmy, whose brown eyes were twinkling with amusement.

"Somebody mailed them free tickets to the movie," the ex-marine declared.

"That's right," Mattie Woodley confirmed. "There was a note with 'em, saying they were only good for the eight o'clock show. We took the seven o'clock bus over, and got there in plenty time. But, land sakes, we don't get to a show very often these days. Anyway, we liked it so well we stayed to see it all over again and missed the last bus home."

HENRY'S right eyelid drooped as he returned Jimmy's knowing grin.

"That," he drawled, "is mos' interesting. Yes." Turning back to Mrs. Woodlen, he asked, "Jus' w'at have you missed from yo' house?"

"My new zipper bag, and my best guest towel," she declared.

"Aw, shucks, Mattie!" her husband protested. "The towel was an old one, and the bag was only worth sixty-five cents."

"Only sixty-five cents?" his wife echoed sarcastically. "Darling, have you any idea of the number of shrimp I must peel to earn that much money?"

Woodlen grinned at Henry. "The zipper bags were on sale at Dupre's Hardware Store last month. Seems like, everybody and his brother bought one. And they were all alike as peas in the same pod."

The telephone rang. Jimmy lifted the receiver, listened for a second or two and then passed the receiver to Henry. "Vicou. He's in a tizzy about something."

Henry clapped the instrument to his ear and boomed into the mouthpiece: "*Bo' jou'—bo' jou', mon cher Alphonse.* Just tell Oncle Henri where the pain is."

"It is not a joking matter." Sheriff Alphonse Vicou's thin, reedy voice sounded over the wire like that of a juvenile character in a radio play. "Did you know that about nine-thirty last night the north-bound bus was held up just south of Number Two Draw, and a male passenger taken off at pistol point by a man representing himself as an agent of the F. B. I.?"

It took Henry a second or two to digest the sheriff's long-winded question. He said: "*Mais non.* Tell me more."

"A black sedan, evidently one stolen from in front of the Hotel Joffrion, came up behind the bus, pulled ahead and then swung across the highway, forcing the bus driver to jam on the brakes in order to avoid a collision. A man got out of the car and boarded the bus, carrying a .45-caliber automatic pistol. He pointed the gun at a male passenger, ordered him off the bus, and then followed with the man's baggage, which he lifted from the overhead rack. The bus driver reports that they entered the sedan, which was then turned and headed down the highway toward St. Odile."

"That," Henry murmured, "is most interesting. Yes." He glanced covertly at the Woodlens and Mr. Monahan. "Con you describe the object taken by this alleged F. B. I. man?"

The sheriff seemed to be pondering the question. After an interval of silence, he asked, "You mean the bag, yes?"

"Describe it, please."

"According to the bus driver," the sheriff piped, "it was a cheap brown canvas bag with a zipper fastener, and with vertical yellow stripe on either side. That type of bag is fairly common."

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"So it seems." Henry stared fixedly at an ink-spot on the blotter and pondered his next question. "Can you describe the one who was taken off the bus?"

"*Mais oui,*" the sheriff declared, adding, "It isn't much of a description—medium height and build, dark hair and eyes, small mustache. Wore a blue pin-stripe suit."

"You are looking for them yes?"

"Andre Zhockson Fortier is in charge of the case," Vicou said. "He and a large posse of deputies are now combing Little Swamp."

"That," Henry drawled, "is just fine. I'll call you back later." He cradled the telephone and winked at Jimmy. "411 Roosevelt Road ain't the only place having monkeyshine' las' night, by damn."

"I'll talk about that later," Jimmy said guardedly. Turning to the Woodlens, he promised, "We'll do our best to get back your zipper bag and your towel."

THE young woman took the hint. "We might as well go home, Bert," she suggested, rising. "Land sakes! I'll take me all day to rid up the mess. That means I lose a day at the cannery."

"Before you go," Henry suggested, "I want to know if this man is the wan w'at tried to fo'ce you to sell yo' house." He pointed to Mr. Monahan.

"He certainly is not," she declared tartly. "Moreover, I'm not making any charge against him, because he couldn't have ruined my fireplace and he all tied up that way. I guess we might just as well forget the whole affair. Come, Bert."

As the couple left, Henry sat down again and gave Mr. Monahan the "eagle eye." "Jus' w'at you doing in ma *ville*?" he demanded. "And don't give me any malarkee about making an investigation fo' an insurance company."

Mr. Monahan moistened his thin lips and grinned broadly.

"You may turn off the half whammy," he suggested blandly. "I've been glared at by experts. As a matter of fact, my dear sir, I was telling the unvarnished, unadulterated truth when I said I was investigating a couple who once lived at 411 Roosevelt Road. Their name was Seeger."

It took Henry a second or two to realize that he had just been told something. Toying with his mustache, he stared reflectively at Mr. Monahan and mused:

"I never could figure why them folks went away from St. Odle and left everything behind. Mebbe you can tell me, yes?"

"I can," Mr. Monahan declared. "They ran their car off the road up in Arkansas. Both were instantly killed." He polished the fingernails of his right hand on the left sleeve of his coat, studied the result with critical eyes, then looked up at Henry and grinned.

"I see you're nobody's fool," he declared wheedlingly. "So I guess I might as well come clean. As I've already told you, I specialize in insurance cases—recovery of stolen property, fraudulent claims and so-forth. Just now, I'm interested in proving the falsity of a claim made by one Ralph Seeger, who professes to be the brother of Claude Seeger, the man who once lived in the house on Roosevelt Road. This Ralph Seeger is trying to collect ten thousand dollars due on Claude Seeger's life policy, claiming he is Claude's brother and only surviving heir."

"How you know he ain't?" Henry quizzed.

"We don't," Mr. Monahan admitted. "He may be Claude's sole heir, or he may be a misery chisler who's taking advantage of a similarity in names to make a fast ten thousand bucks."

"So?" Henry prompted.

"Ralph Seeger claims that Claude and his wife lived with him, in Joplin, Missouri, in 1939 and 1940," Mr. Monahan explained. "It's my job to prove him wrong."

"That shouldn't be hard," Henry pointed out. "Them Seegers lived here in St. Odile from 1938 to 1941. The tax rolls will prove that."

Mr. Monahan's little blue eyes twinkled from under his bushy brows like twin lights in a cavern. "See what I mean? With that record in black and white, we've got that phony Seeger over a barrel. You'll let me make a photostat of your records, I hope?"

"Any tam'," Henry agreed. "But tell me, did that wan really knock you out over there at the Woodlen house?"

Mr. Monahan removed his derby and exhibited the bruise on his bald spot. "I didn't get this in a pillow fight," he declared.

"You could identify him, if you saw him again, yes?"

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This time, Mr. Monahan polished the fingernails of his left hand on his right sleeve. Having studied the result, he said:

"Sorry! I wouldn't know the guy if he were to walk through the doorway this very minute. You see, it was dark."

Henry looked at Jimmy, who smiled cryptically and brushed the back of his left hand with his right. Henry interpreted the motion and nodded. Turning to Mr. Monahan, he said:

"Well, I reckon, me, we cain't put a man in jail jus' because some other feller hits him over the haid and ties him up. If you check along Roosevelt Road, you'll fin' plenty folks who remember the Seegers. W'en you get ready to mak' that photostat, jus' let me know."

"Thanks a million, Chief!" Mr. Monahan rose, straightened the legs of his trousers and adjusted his four-in-hand tie. Then he shook hands with Henry and Jimmy. "First of all," he added, "I must attend to the needs of the inner man. Can you recommend a good place to eat?"

"Madame Lafarge's down the street is the bes' place in South Louisiana," Henry informed him.

"Thanks again. And good day, gentlemen!" Mr. Monahan strode from the room with the confident dignity of a circuit judge.

Henry stood in the doorway and watched him hurry down Main Street and climb the steps of the Lafarge menage. Turning Henry walked back to his chair, sat down and looked questioningly at his assistant.

"You have something to tell me, oui?"

The ex-marine grinned. "There was more than one man in that mixup out on Roosevelt Road," he declared. "About nine o'clock last night, just as the bus was about to pull out, a guy came running down Main Street, carrying a brown canvas zipper bag. He barely managed to make the bus. But as it pulled out, two more guys in a black sedan went racing after it. They pulled alongside for a minute, as if they were looking over the passengers. Then they fell behind and followed the bus out of town. And the guy with the zipper bag wore a blue pin-stripe suit."

"So?" Henry mused. "That Monahan told the truth, after all. W'at you think of that wan?"

The ex-marine shrugged. "Don't ask me. I've been up against so many phonies since I took up police work that I'm suspicious of everybody I meet. Why not call Corrigan and ask him to give you the lowdown on that Monahan character? He should know."

Henry sighed. "Thass the trouble wit' po-lice work; it destroy' wan's faith in human nature." He lifted the telephone. "Hello, Miss Emmeline! Put me through to the F. B. I. field office in N'Awlyins."

He cradled the telephone and sat down again, happy at last to have a problem into which he could sink his teeth, even though it involved such apparent trifles as *gris-gris* dolls, missing zipper bags, ruined fireplaces and a private detective from St. Louis whom he suspected of lying like a Russian diplomat regarding his business in St. Odile.

WHILE waiting for his call to go through, he told Jimmy of the incident on the bus, as relayed to him by the sheriff.

"The whole business is hooked together," the ex-marine declared. "Papa Tou-tou's murder, the attempt to get the Woodlens out of their house, that doings on the bus and the wrecking of Woodlens' fireplace. It all adds up."

The telephone rang. Lifting the receiver, Henry heard the operator say: "Your call's ready. Go ahead."

"Hello, Henry?" A familiar, high-pitched voice rippled over the wire. "That you, Henry?"

"It ain't nobody else but," Henry assured the G-man. "Look, Dan, have y'all got a man operating in this deestrick?"

"Not that I know of," Corrigan said. "If we had, he'd report to the sheriff's office, or to you."

"It's lak' this, Dan," Henry began, then went on to tell the Federal man of what had happened within the past two days, beginning with the murder of Papa Tou-tou and concluding with the advent of Mr. Monahan into the picture."

"That wasn't any Federal man," Corrigan asserted. "If he were, he wouldn't choose a bus to make the pinch. That, old horse, has all the earmarks of a gang taking one of their pals for a ride. You mentioned a party named Monahan. What does he look like?"

"He looks lak'—" Henry frowned and

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groped in his mind for a fitting description of the man from St. Louis.

Jimmy snickered. "Tell him he looks like a straight man in an Irish comedy team," he advised.

"Ha!" Harry crowed. "Thass right. He looks lak' a stage Irishman, that wan."

Corrigan chuckled. "I know who you mean. That's Cy Monahan, better known as 'The Judge.' If he's working some of his schemes down there, you'll have both your hands full. He's a sharpie."

"A crook, yes."

"I wouldn't go so far as to say he's downright crooked. Just slightly unethical," Corrigan corrected. "He's been suspected of contacting crooks with a hot haul, talking them into turning the stuff over to him, after which he collects the reward and splits with the mob."

"That," Henry drawled, "she sound plenty crooked to me. Yes."

The Federal man chuckled. "If we come right down to it, I reckon he's doing no worse than a lot of private dicks are doing all over the country. You can blame the insurance companies for that. What's Monahan trying to get away with in your bailiwick?"

HENRY told him of Monahan's interest in 411 Roosevelt Road, then backtracked and gave the Federal man a short history of the property.

"Seeger?" Corrigan repeated. "That name rings a bell somewhere. I'll look through the 'S' files and see if I can come up with something on them. If I find anything, I'll call you back."

"Thass fine!" Henry approved. *"Au voir!"*

He replaced the receiver and beamed at Jimmy, gratified now that his suspicion of Mr. Monahan had been verified by an authority like Daniel J. Corrigan. Stepping to his desk, he pulled out the bottom drawer and helped himself to a stogie that looked like a short length of tarred heaving line. He was lighting up when the telephone rang again.

"Hello?" Jimmy answered. "Yes, this is police headquarters." He looked up at Henry. "Someone wants to talk to you."

Henry took the telephone. "Hello? Henry Pou speaking."

"This is Raoul Dugas, Capitaine Henri," a strong masculine voice replied in French. "I want to talk with you, but Odette and I fear to leave our house. Can you come over. I think we're in trouble."

"Tres bien," Henry replied. "I'll be over in a few minutes. Where do you live?"

"On Magnolia Street. The number is 712."

"Hokay," Henry grunted. He replaced the telephone and looked at Jimmy. "Raoul Dugas? You know that wan, yes?"

"Sure," the ex-marine assured him. "He's in the bookkeeping department over in the cannery. He married Odette Cormier week before last. You must know Raoul, because he's something of a novelty—a blond Cajan."

Henry nodded. "I recall that wan now. He says he's in trouble. Reckon I'd better go and see w'at that trouble is."

He left the office, crossed Main Street and headed toward a new residential section known as the Eastern Addition, the smoke from his stogie trailing out astern like smoke from the funnel of an old-fashioned coal-burning destroyer. Finally he turned into a flower-filled dooryard, strode along a flagged walk and stepped up on the front gallery of a small, white-painted house.

Instantly, the front door swung open, and a young woman beckoned him hastily inside. Henry removed his hat and bowed, recalling now that he had watched her grow from a gawky schoolgirl to the well poised young woman whose dark, exotic beauty revealed her mixed French and Spanish blood.

"Tres bien, cherie," Henry boomed, stepping into the living room. "What is all this trouble Raoul mentioned over the telephone?"

"It's right here, Capitaine Henri." A tall, blond young man pointed toward the library table, on which rested a brown canvas zipper bag. "Just watch."

Opening the bag, he lifted out a tightly rolled towel. With shaking hands, he spread the towel, revealing to Henry's astonished eyes a scintillating array of jewelry.

"There," Raoul Dugas declared, "if that doesn't spell trouble, I'll eat my last season's straw hat."

For several long minutes Henry stared in silence at the sparkling heap, which in-

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cluded four diamond necklaces, three long ropes of pearls, several jeweled tiaras, a dozen diamond-studded bracelets and a double handful of diamond rings, all mingled in glittering confusion.

"So?" Henri looked questioningly at the young man. "What's the story?"

"We'll let Odette tell it," Raoul Dugas suggested. He indicated a chair. "Have a seat. She'll be back in a minute." He sat in a chair facing Henry and ventured, "That stuff must have been stolen, don't you think?"

"Right now," Henry drawled, "I don't know what to think."

The young woman returned with a tray containing three cups of coffee. She passed the coffee around and then, having fulfilled the requirements of Cajan hospitality, sat in another chair, fluttered her hands at Henry and declared:

"The man took the wrong bag."

"Ha!" Henry saw a light beginning to break. "You also bought one of those sixty-five-cent zipper bags at Dupre's, yes?"

"That is so," she confirmed. "I carried it last night when I took the nine o'clock bus to Sellierville, to stay overnight with my sister, Melanie. I carried only a few things in my bag, which was an exact duplicate of this one. Raoul saw me off.

"Well, the bus was about to start, when a man came running down Main Street and clambered aboard, all out of breath, and slumped to a seat alongside me. The first thing I noticed about him was that he carried a bag exactly like mine, which I had placed in the luggage rack above the seat. He merely placed his on the floor and pushed it partly under the seat.

"I noticed a black sedan running alongside the bus for some distance, while the man beside me cowered down, as if he wanted to avoid being seen. The car dropped back and followed behind the bus until we reached the stretch of highway that cuts through Little Swamp. Then the car picked up speed, passed the bus and swung across the road, forcing the bus driver to jam on the brakes so suddenly that most of the passengers were jarred out of their seats.

"Next, a man climbed out of the car, walked back to the bus and demanded admittance, claiming he was an agent of the F. B. I. When the driver opened the door, the man climbed aboard the bus and pointed a big black pistol at the man beside me.

"'Come on, Charley,'" he said. "'This is the end of the line for you!'"

"He kept the man covered with his gun, while he searched him and took a revolver from his coat pocket. Then he forced him to his feet, lifted my bag from the rack and followed. I was so excited that I didn't realize until later that he had taken my bag.

"I saw them get into the sedan, which turned around and headed south again. The bus went on to Sellierville. When I was about to get off, I looked for my bag and saw this one under the seat. I thought then that my bag had been jarred from the luggage rack by the sudden stopping of the bus. So I accepted the bag as my own, until I began to get ready for bed. Then I got the surprise of my life."

"That," Henry drawled, "would be a great surprise. Yes."

"Melanie wanted me to call the sheriff at once and turn the jewels over to him," Odette went on. "But I decided to call Raoul first. He advised me to say nothing to anyone before he had a chance to talk to you about it. So I remained at my sister's for the night, and came home on the ten o'clock bus this morning."

Henry grinned. "I, for one, am glad you didn't turn the stuff over to Coozan Al. Later, I may tell you the answer to that, in case you're curious. But, first of all, I must contact the F. B. I. and have them check on recent jewel robberies." He looked hopefully at Odette. "Was there anything in the bag that might identify you?"

"I lettered her name and address on the side of the bag in indelible pencil," Raoul declared.

"Ma foi!" Henry drawled. "That is not good. It may be laughable to consider that one's disappointment when he opened the bag and found it to be filled with feminine fripperies, instead of jewels." He toyed with his mustache and regarded the young couple with troubled eyes. "I don't know what to do with you. Until this case is cleared up, neither of you will be safe."

"If that bum tries to bother Odette," Dugas growled, in his anger reverting to English, "I'll take him apart. Don't worry about us, Chief. I was a combat infantry-

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man in the war. I learned to take care of myself."

"What would you do if that one walked through the kitchen door this very moment and held us up with a gun?" Henry queried, then answered his own question. "You would rush him, to protect Odette, and get yourself shot. No?"

Dugas nodded soberly. "I guess that's about what I'd do, all right. What do you propose?"

"First of all," Henry said, "we must work upon the assumption that the one who got the wrong bag knows the identity of its owner and has taken steps to recover the jewels. If he has proceeded very far in his plans, he may be in St. Odile this moment. Perhaps he already had your house under surveillance.

"Accordingly, your safest plan is to remain at home, with your doors locked. Don't admit anyone, without first identifying him. If a stranger calls and asks questions, one of you get on the telephone and call me. That is all I can think of for the present." He looked at Dugas. "You have a pistol, yes?"

"Sure, a German Luger."

"*Tres bien.* Perhaps you may not be called upon to use it, at least, during the day. It's night time we have to worry about. Now bring me a couple of paper sacks."

Odette brought him two paper bags from the kitchen. Henry slipped one of these inside the other, for added strength, and placed therein the jewels.

"I don't know how all this is going to affect my job at the cannery," Dugas remarked uneasily. "They won't like my taking the day off, right at the peak of the busy season. And assistant bookkeepers are a dime a dozen."

Henry hefted the paper sack, feeling its weight. "If things work out like I'm hoping they will," he said, "you won't have to worry about that thirty-dollar-a-week job. You'll be able to buy an interest in the plant."

He turned to Odette and added warningly, "That depends on how well you can keep a secret, Madame."

"I don't understand."

"You mustn't say anything to anyone about these jewels," he advised. "As yet, I don't know exactly how valuable they are. But until we know, you must keep your mouth shut. Even if one of the sheriff's deputies come nosing around, you know nothing."

"You mean you want her to lie?" Dugas challenged.

Henry shrugged. "Perhaps it would be better if you refer all questioners to me," he suggested.

Raoul grinned. "How are you going to explain to one of the sheriff's deputies?"

Henry beamed. "I don't explain to them. If one of them comes to me, asking foolish questions, I'll just beat his ears down."

Odette giggled. "I believe you would. But what about Madame Woodlen's bag. Shall I return it to her?"

"Leave it here for the present," he advised. "First of all, I have to determine whether this stuff is the real McCoy or the real Woolworth." He started toward the rear of the house. "Remember, if anyone comes asking questions, refer them directly to me."

HENRY left the Dugas home by way of the alley. He came out on Myrtle Street, half a block from the town hall, satisfied that his departure from the young couple's house had not been observed.

Nearly fourteen hours had passed since the bus hold-up. In that interval he realized the hold-up man must have been busy on plans to recover the right bag, the contents of which were too valuable to be abandoned without at least one more attempt to get his hands on them. Once having identified the owner of the bag which he had taken off the bus, he would lose no time in picking up her trail. Perhaps, even at that moment, he was watching the Dugas house, waiting for nightfall.

When Henry entered his office, he found Jimmy asleep in the swivel chair, with his feet on the desk. The ex-marine started awake, brought his feet to the floor and blinked questioningly at the paper sack in Henry's hand.

"What was eating that guy Dugas?" he inquired in English.

Henry smiled and deposited the sack on his desk. "Jus' about wan half-million dollars wort' of jewelry," he explained. Tipping the bag, he spilled its contents over

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the blotter. "Eh, man! You jus' feast yo' eyes on that."

Jimmy stared in silent wonder at the scintillating heap. He picked up a rope of matched pearls, dangled it before his face and suggested, "You tell me."

Henry picked up the telephone, called a number and then said:

"Ha—Meestaire 'Artwell, yes? Henry Pou speaking. Can you please step over to headquarters right away and give us an expert appraisal on some merchandise we got here? Howay."

Replacing the telephone, he helped himself to a stogie, then sat down and told Jimmy of his recent interview with the Dugas couple.

Jimmy snickered. "Brother! I'd sure like to have seen that guy's face when he opened that bag and found it was packed with frillies."

Henry shook his head slowly. "It ain't funny. No," he asserted. "Ontil we get this beezness straighten' out, we'll have to watch them kids day and night." He popped to his feet and beamed as a short, slender man in a gray business suit entered. "Ha, Meestaire 'Artwell. Thank you fo' coming. Pointing carelessly toward the jewels heaped on the blotter, he added, "Would you say that stoff, she is jus' a lotta junk, yes?"

As the jeweler sat down in the chair vacated by Jimmy, Henry closed and locked the door. Then he stood by the desk and watched as Hartwell examined one piece after another.

"This," the jeweler declared finally, "is about the most valuable junk I've ever laid eyes on. On a snap appraisal, I'd say it was worth about six hundred thousand dollars."

"Ma foi!" Henry murmured. "Fonny we 'ave not hear of any beeg jewel snatch lak' this, no?"

HARTWELL picked up a diamond necklace and reverently fingered the glistening stones. "It seems to me," he said slowly, "that I recall a big jewel robbery somewhere up north, several years ago. You know, the Jewelers' Protective Association keeps us posted on happenings of that sort." He laid down the necklace and poked through the heap of rings. "I'm certain this collection has been out of circulation for a long time. You see, those rings have a sort of unused look."

Henry looked at Jimmy and grinned. "They would, after being bricked up in back of a fireplace. Mos' lak'ly, the thieves were afraid to offer 'em fo' sale, figuring they could be identified, no?"

Hartwell shook his head. "I don't believe that's the reason. An expert jewel thief would remove the stones from their settings, as there is nothing especially distinguished about any of the diamonds. The pearls are an entirely different matter, being matched. If the pearl necklaces were broken up and the gems sold separately, their value would be reduced by more than half."

"I can onderstan' that, me," Henry said. "I had me a honch there was a lotta money tied up in 'em. But I wanted yo' expert opinion befo' I could be sho'. Now I'd lak' you to list 'em fo' us."

"But of course," Hartwell agreed. Uncapping his fountain pen, he wrote on the desk pad a piece-by-piece description of the various items. At the end of twenty minutes, he rose and said, "I hope you'll let me know how this comes out."

"Mais oui," Henry promised. "There will be fo' you an appraiser's fee. Don't fo'get that. And I'll see that it is a good wan. Yes."

Hartwell smiled. "That's be nice. Well, I must get back to the store."

Henry accompanied him to the door and bowed him out. Returning to the desk, he sat down and called the district attorney's office on the telephone. When he heard the click of Mr. Fontenette's false teeth in the receiver, he inquired:

"Anything further on that bus hold-up, Albair?"

"Mais oui," Albert Fontenette assured him. "We have one dead man, with a .45-caliber bullet in his heart, and another man lying in a coma from a bullet-graze along the right side of his head."

"Most interesting," Henry murmured, his right eyelid drooping as he looked across the desk at Jimmy. "Tell me more, *mon cher Albair.*"

"The bus driver has identified the dead man as the one who was taken from the bus, and the unconscious one as the hold-up man," the D. A. declared.

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"You can describe them, yes?"

"The dead man is of medium height and build," Fontenette revealed. "With dark hair and eyes and one of those ridiculous little mustaches."

"That bullet through the heart must have spoiled his blue pin-stripe suit," Henry suggested.

"*Nom du diable!*" Fontenette snapped. "One suspects that you already know more about this affair than the sheriff. Don't forget, *mon cher* Henri, that you are investigator for this office."

"Let me remind you that I haven't yet been commissioned on this case," Henry pointed out. "Officially, I am just the town cop of St. Odile. Vicou says he turned the case over to Fortier. By the way, have those men been identified?"

"*Mais oui.* Their pockets were empty—turned wrong side out. But they have definitely been identified by one M'sieu Monahan, an insurance investigator from St. Louis."

"Ha!" Henry chuckled. "You have met that one."

"A most charming gentleman," the D. A. assured him.

"M'sieu Monahan, a gentleman most charming," Henry repeated for Jimmy's benefit. If only a buttery voice and a suave manner were needed to make a very charming gentleman, then Mr. Monahan certainly had the goods. "What did that one say about them?" he asked.

"He identifies the dead man as one Charley Faunce, formerly a private detective in St. Louis, who lost his license by becoming involved in a blackmail racket. The other is one Frank Galtani, a known jewel thief. M'sieu Monahan warns me that the third and mose dangerous member of the gang must be somewhere in the vicinity, as he and Galtani always worked as a team."

"That," Henry declared with emphasis, "is bad. Just how badly is Galtani wounded?"

"Dr. Maupin is puzzled about him," Fontenette revealed. "Except for the bullet wound on the side of his head—a mere skin graze—the man seems to be normal. Yet he hasn't moved a muscle, nor responded to any stimulus since he was found among the weeds beside the part of the highway that cuts through Little Swamp. If he doesn't show some reaction by tomorrow, the doctor fears that it will be necessary to operate for brain pressure."

"Did M'sieu Monahan furnish a description of that third man?"

"*Mais non.* You see, Eppley—that's his name, Duke Eppley—has so far managed to avoid arrest, so that there is no file on him anywhere. No one, except Galtani, knows what he looks like. That is why we're so anxiously waiting for Galtani to come out of the coma, hoping he'll furnish a description of his associate."

"I see," Henry murmured absently. "You'll want me to help on the case, yes?"

"*Mais non.*" The D. A. brushed him off with a short laugh. "This affair isn't of sufficient importance for that—just another gang-revenge killing, according to M'sieu Monahan. André Jackson Fortier is in complete charge, and seems to be doing very well. By the way, do you know of one Odette Dugas, who lives in your *ville?*"

"What about her?" Henry parried.

"A brown canvas zipper bag, with her name and address written on the side in indelible pencil, and containing a number of intimate feminine garments and two quart jars of peach preserves, was found near the scene of the crime," the D. A. revealed. "We've been wondering if there could be some connection."

"The bag probably was lost from a car," Henry suggested. "Madame Raoul Dugas is a perfectly respectable young wife. How could she be involved with a gang of foreign crooks from St. Louis?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Fontenette confessed. "I thought of sending Fortier down to question her—"

"You send that *cretin* to bother those young people," Henry boomed into the telephone, "and I'll tear him up. If you want Odette Dugas questioned, I'll question her. Get it?"

"Oh, very well, Henry," the D. A. surrendered. "You ask her about her bag and let me know the answer. I'll contact you if anything important develops."

"*Tres bien.* And tell that Fortier to keep his eyes open for Eppley. *Au 'voir!*"

He slammed down the telephone and swore softly, more than ever aware of the danger hovering over the glossy, dark head of Odette Dugas.

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HENRY frowned in silent perplexity as he scooped the jewels into the paper sack as if they were mere pebbles, without value. It was, he thought, bad enough to be threatened by an enemy whom one could identify. But to be menaced by an unknown—*ma foi!* That was a thousand times worse.

"Look"—he swiveled his chair around to face Jimmy, who was dozing in another chair tilted back against the wall—"I know you should be home in bed. But them Dugas kids gotta be protected."

Jimmy yawned, rose and stretched his arms above his head. "Is it that bad?" he wanted to know.

"She may be worse," Henry declared. He told his assistant of Mr. Monahan's identification of the two men, and of his warning that Eppley, the third man in the case, was the really dangerous one. "I figure me, that Eppley, he will mak' an attempt to get back this stoff. He won't know Odette has turned it in. So he'll go to her house, mebbe some tam' tonight, and try to recover it. Mebbe he'll try it in broad daylight. Me, I don't know."

"You want me to be their bodyguard?" Jimmy asked.

Henry nodded. "Thass right. Go over there and stay until I tak' you off. Tell Raoul it's orders. If any stranger comes nosing around, put the arm on him. And if that species of a camel, Fortier, butts in and tries to question Odette, throw him right out of the house. Understand?"

The ex-marine snickered. "Throwing M'sieu Andre Zhockson Fortier out of a house—any house—would be a pleasure. That microcephalic idiot will get the old heave-o the minute he sticks his long nose past the door frame."

Henry beamed. "Thass ma boy!" He didn't exactly know what a microcephalic idiot was. But the term sounded impressive when used in reference to Deputy Sheriff Andrew Jackson Fortier, sometimes known as "Old Hickory," who was being groomed by his uncle, Sheriff Alphonse Vicou, to take Henry's place as special investigator for the district attorney's office.

After Jimmy left, Henry carried the sack of jewels across the street to the bank and placed it in his safety deposit box. Relieved to be rid of them for the time being, he returned to the office, helped himself to a stogie, then sat in his swivel chair, with his feet on the desk and reviewed the happenings of the past thirty-six hours.

He now knew why an attempt had been made to force the Woodlens to sell their newly acquired home—. Charley Faunce, the discredited private detective, the man with the blue pin-stripe suit and the black pin-stripe mustache, had handled that detail. Likewise, it must have been he who had bought the *gris-gris* dolls from Papa Tou-Tou, hoping to scare the couple into selling. And it was he who had murdered the old voodoo man to prevent him from becoming an embarrassing witness.

Aware that his plan to frighten the Woodlens had failed, Faunce had mailed them the theater tickets from Sellierville, surmising that the impecunious young couple would grasp eagerly at an evening's free entertainment. Having made certain that they had departed on the bus for the parish seat, he had broken into their house. He must have been interrupted in his search of the premises by the arrival of Mr. Monahan, which caused him to lose valuable time in immobilizing the man from St. Louis, thus giving Galtani and Eppley a chance to catch up with him.

THE latter pair must have spotted Faunce as he was on his way toward the bus stop. The man's panicky flight down Main Street, pursued by the black sedan, suggested two possibilities: that Faunce was working on his own, and that Galtani and Eppley were out to hi-jack him; or that all three had been in the scheme to recover the jewels and that Faunce had double-crossed them at the last moment. Henry smiled contemplatively as he realized that only the prompt departure of the bus had saved Main Street from becoming the setting for a gun battle.

The knowledge that one Duke Eppley, whom Mr. Monahan had described as the most dangerous one of the trio, was still foot-loose itched like a ripe chilblain. Surmising that Dan Corrigan would know about the man, Henry fought back an impulse to snatch up the telephone and call the genial Federal man. Corrigan, he realized, was a busy man. Besides, he had promised to call back, as soon as he had

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anything to give out. Until that call came, Henry told himself, he could only wait and hope.

He sent down to Brossins for sandwiches and ate a belated lunch at his desk, unwilling to go beyond hearing of the telephone, for fear that the expected call might come during his absence.

The afternoon passed. Dusk stretched a purple veil over the sky. The birds in the magnolias bordering the banquettes along Main Street stopped their noisy chatter and settled down for the night. Henry's uneasiness grew with the passing of the hours. Sitting on the bench outside the door, he watched the dwindling traffic crossing the drawbridge into town, and wondered if Corrigan had forgotten all about his promise. But, even if the expected call never came, Henry had a feeling that the showdown wasn't far off.

At seven o'clock he threw in the switch controlling the street lights. He was about to resume his seat on the bench when he saw a familiar-looking jeep painted a brilliant red, rolling across the drawbridge into town. He swore softly and watched the car take Main Street in the sliding rush peculiar to vehicles of that type, and come to a squealing stop against the banquette in front of the town hall.

A tall, lanky young man in khaki shirt and breeches, knee-high laced boots and dusty, black ten-gallon hat, climbed out of the little car and came toward Henry in a loping stride that suggested a giraffe in rapid motion.

"What do you want here?" growled Henry.

Deputy Sheriff Andrew Jackson Fortier, sometimes known as "Old Hickory," bared his buck teeth in a placating grin, and replied to Henry's angry query in what he obviously believed to be the King's English.

"*Ma foi!*" he protested. "Ain't no needcessity fo' you to git mad. Eh, man! Not'ing you got, I want. *Mais non.* Fontenette, he was figure you might need help, him. Thassall."

Henry glared up at the grinning deputy. Intrusion of the sheriff's office into the case, in the person of Old Hickory, was the last thing he wanted. He had, for that very reason, omitted any mention of the jewels in his recent telephone conversation with the district attorney. Likewise, he had deliberately played down Odette Dugas' adventure, realizing that if it became known that half a million dollars in jewelry was involved, every deputy in the parish would be clamoring for a share in the reward. That, Henry wanted to avoid, knowing that a division among so many would leave little for the two most deserving—Mattie Woodlen and Odette Dugas.

Henry removed his hat and let the cool night breeze ruffle his crisp, black hair, while he tried to think up some excuse that would get this latest nuisance off his neck. Just then the ancient Negro who delivered telegrams for the local Western Union office came shuffling around the corner of the town hall and moved purposefully toward the green door marked "Police Headquarters."

"Evening, Oncle Bonfils!" Henry greeted, as the old man came to a halt before him. "You got something fo' me, yes?"

"Sho has, Cap'n Henry, suh," the ancient messenger confirmed. Doffing his uniform cap, he extracted from within a yellow envelope. "Right from the F. B. and I., such."

Henry took the telegram and said, "This may require an answer. Come inside."

ENTERING the office, he sat down in his swivel chair and switched on the desk lamp. Fortier came in, sat on a corner of the desk and fixed beady, black eyes on the telegram. Uncle Bonfils, cap in hand, waited just inside the door.

"How come," Fortier demanded in an aggrieved tone, "that F. B. I. she's send you telegrams? You ain't the sheriff's office. No."

Henry delayed opening the envelope, aware that every moment of delay was fanning the other's curiosity to fever pitch. Laying the unopened envelope on the blotter, he leaned back in his chair and stared contemplatively up at the younger man. In twenty years or so, he reflected, Andrew Jackson Fortier would look exactly as his uncle, Sheriff Alphonse Vicou, looked now. The young deputy had his uncle's narrow, sloping forehead, his enormous beak of a nose, his outstanding ears and negligible chin. Studying the face of the impatient young man, he was reminded of a slightly bellicose rabbit.

Henry smiled as he realized how decep-

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tive appearances could be. Fortier, he knew, was neither a fool nor a coward. In fact, the worst that could be said about him was that he was an inveterate glory hound.

Suddenly the telephone rang.

Lifting the receiver, Henry drawled: "Po-lice, yes?"

An agitated voice squeaked in French: "Andre Zhockson Fortier, he is there, yes?"

"Oui." Henry passed the instrument to Fortier. "Your uncle inquires about you."

The deputy snatched the telephone and bawled: "'Allo?" He listened for a few seconds, a frown of worry wrinkling his sloping forehead, then continued, "No, that cannot be! Yes, yes!" He slammed down the telephone and rushed from the office. Climbing behind the wheel of his jeep, he stamped the motor into life, jerked the little car away from the banquette, whirled it around and sent it tearing out of town with the siren going full blast.

"Well!" Henry exclaimed. "What got into that cretin?"

Uncle Bonfils chuckled. "Young boss who' in a hurry."

Henry stared at an ink spot on the blotter and tried to recall Fortier's words: "Hello? No, that cannot be. Yes, yes!" He dismissed the matter with a shrug, surmising that the deputy had been called to investigate a car accident on the highway.

He tore open the envelope and extracted the telegram, which read:

LITTLE ROCK OFFICE REPORTS SEEGERS EMPLOYED AS GARDENER AND MAID ODENWALD HOME ST LOUIS MO WHEN ODENWALD JEWELRY LIFTED. PAIR ELDERLY COUPLE NO RECORD NOT SUSPECTED. QUIT JOBS FOLLOWING YEAR. DISAPPOINTED. NO TRACE UNTIL KILLED IN AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT NINETEEN FORTY-ONE. BODIES IDENTIFIED BY FORMER ST LOUIS NEWSMAN. NUMBER DIAMOND RINGS SEWN IN WOMANS GARMENTS IDENTIFIED PART OF ODENWALD COLLECTION. INSURANCE INVESTIGATORS UNABLE TO LEARN WHEREABOUTS OF SEEGERS BETWEEN NINETEEN THIRTY-EIGHT AND NINETEEN FORTY-ONE. IF YOU KNOW ANY MORE CONTACT ME WITHOUT DELAY. CORRIGAN.

Henry beamed. "This just about wraps up the case in a lot of nice reward money. "Yes." Reaching for the desk-pad, he picked up a pencil and wrote:

"Believe have recovered Odenwald jewels. Am mailing descriptive list and further details tonight. Henry Pou."

He tore off the page and handed it to the old Negro, adding a fifty-cent tip. "Tell the operator to get that off right away. It is now Oncle Sam's beezness. Yes."

When the old messenger left, Henry lighted a stogie, leaned back in his chair and stared reflectively at the blue smoke wreathes swirling about the desk lamp. The last piece of the picture puzzle was now in place.

Corrigan's telegram had told him all he wanted to know, perhaps more than the genial Federal man had suspected. For one thing, it suggested between the lines that the Seegers had been rank amatures, an elderly couple who had suddenly decided to make a big haul and quit, to live a life of ease.

Being a nice, elderly couple, without any previous criminal record, was obviously why they hadn't been suspected. But, being amateurs, they hadn't known how to dispose of the loot through fences. So they had chosen St. Odile as a hideaway and waited for the stuff to cool off. Evidently, they'd started out to get rid of some of the jewels when they were killed in the automobile accident.

"Ma foi!" He murmured. "The way of the transgressor is filled with bumps and pot-holes. Yes, indeed." He read the telegram again and again, marveling at the success of the hi-jackers in tracing down the Seegers, when the insurance investigators had failed.

He surmized that the papers had started Eppley and the others on the trail of the loot. The discovery of the victims' identity, of the rings hidden in the woman's clothing, coupled with the revelation that they had worked for the Odenwalds at the time of the robbery, must have acted as a spark to their imaginations. It was still too early to determine whether Faunce had acted independently of the others, or whether he had been hired by Eppley to back-track the Seegers in an effort to discover where they had lived between Nineteen Thirty-eight and Nineteen Forty-one. As for Mr. Monahan, it went without saying that he was

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working solely for Number One, trailing the others, waiting for them to uncover the loot, planning to step in at the right moment and take it away from them. Only that theory could explain his presence in the Woodlen home on the night of the burglary.

Henry glanced through the open door and along Main Street, his recollection flashing back to Fortier's abrupt departure. He surmized that the young deputy had come to St. Odile for the express purpose of questioning Odette in regard to her overnight bag being found near the scene of Faunce's murder. That, Henry realized, with a sudden feeling of guilt, would be disastrous. He knew that Odette wouldn't lie, but would tell Fortier the whole story. That would send Old Hickory rushing back to Sellierville, to complain to the D. A. that Henry was withholding vital evidence. The D. A. would at once apply for a writ of replevin, requiring that the jewels be placed in custody of the court. And that would be that, while both Odette and Mattie Woodlen being left out in the cold when the reward was being divided.

"That should just not happen to those fine people," he exclaimed. *"Mais non!"*

HENRY glanced at the little clock on his desk, saw that the hands were pointing to eight-thirty. If Andrew Jackson Fortier had the questioning of Odette Dugas in his mind, the thought would stick like a burr to a blanket until he had put it into action.

Reaching for the telephone, Henry called the Dugas home and asked for Jimmy. When the ex-marine answered, Henry queried:

"W'at goes over there?"

"Suzanne came over," Jimmy informed him, "So we decided to make it a *fais-do-do.*" Suzanne was Jimmy's wife.

"I regret to break up your all-night dance," Henry apologized. "But this is beezness. Yes. Here's w'at I want you to do: At nine o'clock, you and Suzanne take Raoul and Odette over to yo' place. Befo' y'all leave, turn out all the lights, but leave the back do' onlock'. But befo' you leave, take off yo' gun-belt, and put yo' badge in yo' pocket. You see, we don't want any wan to know those kids are onder po-lice protection. *Comprenez vous?*"

"I get you. You're aiming to work the old rat-trap routine?"

"Thass right," Henry confirmed. "When you take the others to yo' place, come right back to the Dugas house. If you fin' the place still dark, scout around on the outside, mak'ing lak' yo are still in the jungle, stalking Japs."

Jimmy snickered. "You'll be on the inside, I'll be on the outside, and anyone in between will be out of luck. That the idea?"

"Thass ma boy!" Henry exclaimed. "If you ron into anybody in the dark, jus' put the slug on him and leave the explaining fo' later. See w'at I mean? Hokay. Now I want to talk wit' Odette."

He waited until he heard the girl's soft-voiced *"Oui?"* Then he said coaxingly in French: "*Cherie*, you have some fruit jars you don't need, yes?"

"I believe I have a few. Why do you ask?"

"Take about four or five quart-size jars," Henry directed. "Have Raoul or Jimmy break them into very small pieces with a hammer. Wrap the fragments in Madame Woodlen's towel and place them in her zipper bag. Then hide the bag in your bedroom closet. You understand?"

"I understand your words, even if I can't derive any meaning from them," she replied laughingly.

Henry chuckled. "I can't stop to explain right now. You do just as I tell you, and we'll all have a good laugh about it later. *Au 'voir!*"

He cradled the telephone, rose and locked the front door and drew the window shade. He opened the bottom drawer of the filing cabinet, took out a pair of brown canvas sneakers and substituted them for his regular shoes. Unbuckling his Sam Browne belt, he hung it on a peg, drew his long-barreled six-shooter from its scabbard and stuck it inside the waistband of his trousers. Finally, he exchanged his hat for a black cloth cap, unpinned his badge and put it in his shirt pocket and left the building by way of the alley door.

He crept through the alley behind the town hall to the intersection of Oak Street, looked quickly along the block, then turned left and hurried toward the Eastern Addition. Eight minutes after leaving headquarters, he paused at the mouth of the alley that

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ran through the block behind the D gas house.

Keeping in the shadow of the trees on the edge of the banquette, Henry walked to the street corner. He always had considered St. Odile a "nine-o'clock town." But it was now well past nine o'clock, and no one seemed to be thinking of bed. Somewhere along the block an aspiring Paderewski was running the scale on a piano. In a house on the opposite corner a radio was blaring out boogie-woogie that made Henry think of a piano being thrown downstairs. Children played in the dooryards, their scurrying figures flashing to and fro through the rectangles of light slanting through open doors and windows. Only one house in the block was dark—the one directly opposite the Dugas home.

Henry turned and walked back to the alley. He moved quietly through the byway, his gray-blue uniform blending with the weathered cypress boards of the back fences. When he reached the back line of the Dugas place, he drew aside a loose board and squeezed through the opening.

He waited inside the fence until he saw the lights in the house go off. When he heard the party moving through the dooryard to the street, he scurried, bent almost double, toward the back steps, climbed swiftly to the rear gallery and slipped through the back doorway into the kitchen.

Henry turned the key in the lock of the kitchen door, realizing that an unlocked door would seem too obvious to a seasoned housebreaker. His rubber-soled shoes slid noiselessly over the polished floor as he moved toward the front of the house and peered through the living-room window.

Down the block, Jimmy and his wife and the Dugas' were walking slowly toward the corner. As they passed from view around the turn, he brought his gaze back to the house across the street. The building was still dark, its door and windows black, rectangular patches against the white weatherboarding. Henry twitched like a dog that has just sighted a rabbit as he caught a swift blur of movement against the foundation shrubbery. As he watched, a man flitted like a gray shadow across the lawn, stepped over a low hedge of flowering pomegranate to the banquette, across which he scurried swiftly to the shadow of the camphor trees on the parking. There he paused, his figure seeming to merge with the treetrunks, while he peered intently toward a black automobile which had crept around the opposite corner of the block and was nosing in against the curbing.

The headlights of the car were switched off. But no one alighted. When Henry again looked toward the opposite side of the street, he saw that the man had emerged from the shadows of the trees and was walking boldly across the intersection. As Henry watched, the man passed from his field of vision.

Henry waited, his nervousness increasing as the minutes ticked slowly away. Somewhere in the neighborhood, a "hot" band, composed of a violin, a guitar, a saxophone and an accordion, began grinding out "Jolie Blond." Tree frogs croaked out an accompaniment to the perennial bayou country favorite, the whole blending in a din which almost blanketed the sharp creak of a board on the back gallery.

Henry sighed in sheer relief as he slid his gun from his waistband. Here, at last, was a promise of action. Someone was about to walk into the trap—a trap baited with a bag filled with fragments of broken glass.

Stepping quietly back into the dining room, Henry squeezed into the corner behind the china closet and waited. Presently he heard the snap of the lock being forced, followed by a soft creek of dry hinges.

The intruder closed the door, paused for a moment to listen, then tiptoed through the kitchen to the dining room, halted again and peered about him in the darkness. Apparently satisfied that he was alone in the house, he turned and re-entered the kitchen, where Henry could hear him groping about the stove. Presently a match scraped, and the man stepped back into the dining room, holding a lighted match above his head in his cupped right hand.

He moved toward the door of the bedroom below a cone of light, turned the knob of the door, listened for an instant and then entered, closing the panel softly behind him.

Henry came from behind the china cabinet and stood with his left hand hovering above the wall switch, the gun in his right hand covering the bedroom door, while he listened to the intruder stumbling around inside, no longer making any effort to be quiet.

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Suddenly the door swung open, and the shadowy figure of the intruder appeared on the threshold. Pressing the switch button, Henry flooded the dining room with light and brought up his gun to cover the short, slender man who stood with one foot advanced, his black eyes popping in sudden dismay, his right arm hugging the brown canvas bag to his chest.

"Hokay!" Henry drawled. "Jus' drop that bag and get yo' hands up, Meestaire Epplee."

The intruder's stare of dismayed surprise was replaced by a look of resignation. He dropped the bag, which gave out a musical tinkle as it landed on the floor.

"You've hooked the wrong fish, copper," he declared. "The name ain't Eppley—it's Galtani."

HENRY felt a decided let-down; he had baited his hook for a shark and caught a catfish. He wasted no time in explanations until he had jerked the .38 caliber six-shooter from the other's waistband and snapped the handcuffs on his wrists.

"Hokay." He urged his prisoner toward a chair. "Jus' set down and tell me how come you're here, when you ain't supposed to be able to move han' or foot."

Galtani's black eyes twinkled. "I fooled the sawbones, all right," he chuckled. He looked down at his manacled hands and continued, "First of all, I want you to know I didn't kill Charley Faunce."

"You can tell me about that later," Henry said. "Right now, you will tell me how come you're here."

"Well, some time today, when I came to and found myself lyin' among the weeds beside the road, I tried to get up and scram. But I couldn't move hand or foot. Paralyzed, kinda. By and bye, a gang of hick deputies found me. I didn't rightly know what had happened. But I gathered from their conversation that Charley had been rubbed out, and that they'd tagged me for the job, figurin' we'd shot it out.

"I saw right away the spot I was in. So I played possum when they took me to the hospital. Brother, that was the toughest time I ever had in my life. That damned sawbones stuck pins in me, tickled the soles of my feet, held burnin' feathers under my nose and did everything but dance on my chest, tryin' to bring me to. I don't know how in hell I stood all that without givin' myself away.

"Finally, he gave up, and said he'd operate tomorrow, unless I came out of it. Pretty soon a little white-haired guy came in with that shyster, Monahan, who identified me. The little guy was the D. A. He and Monahan talked freely, figurin' I was in some kinda trance and couldn't hear. From their talk I gathered Eppley was still on the loose, and that a brown canvas zipper bag, filled with woman's duds, had been found among the woods beside Charley's body.

"Y'see, up to that minute, I didn't know I'd picked the wrong bag. Now I knew I'd slipped, and had missed the bag Charley had taken from the Woodlen house and taken the dame's bag instead. I made like a stiff and listened to the D. A. tell Monahan about the name and address on the bag found beside Charley. That was when I decided to go on my own as soon as I was able to lam outa there.

"After dark, I unscrewed the light bulb in my room, stuck a piece of paper in the socket, then put back the bulb and turned on the juice." He grinned. "I blew out every damn' fuse in the joint."

"Wasn't the debbity in yo' room?" Henry queried.

"No, he was settin' in a chair in the hall," Galtani explained. "When all the lights went out, he stuck his head into the room. That was when I beaned him with the water pitcher. I took his gun and his wallet and lammed through the window. Outside on the street, I lifted a car, drove down here and parked in an alley behind the next block. I was hidin' beside that house across the way when the folks who live here left a while ago."

Henry looked at the gun which he had taken from Galtani and then laid it carelessly on the table. He slipped his own weapon inside the waistband of his trousers, pulled up another chair and sat down facing the prisoner.

"Now," he suggested, "you go ahaid and tell me how come you got shot."

GALTANI sighed. "You might as well know the inside of it now, because I'm goin' to cop a plea. Y' see, murder was

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never my dish. In fact, none of us had figured on a killin' until that drip, Faunce, knocked off the old wanga guy.

"Well, to begin at the beginnin': Some years ago Eppley read in the papers about a couple gettin' killed in an automobile smash-up in Arkansas. Their name was Seeger. The papers came out with a story about them bein' jewel thieves, and told about the big haul they'd made from the home of a big shot in St. Looey. Also, the papers claimed the insurance dicks couldn't locate where these folks had bin livin' since they'd made the heist.

"That set Eppley to thinkin'; he was the brain guy. He figured the Seegers musta stashed the bulk of their haul and were out on the road gettin' rid of the smaller stuff. So he contacted Faunce, who used to be a private dick, and set him to back-trackin' the Seegers.

"It took Charley several years, and cost Epp nearly eight thousand bucks before the Seegers were finally located in this burg. Charley reported to Epp from here. Epp contacted me, and we came down to Sellierville together. When Charley met us, he reported about the house where the Seegers had lived bein' sold for taxes to another couple. He'd worked the old routine about buyin' 'em out. But the dame got hard-boiled and told him nothin' doin'. Then Charley pulled that goofy stunt with the *gris-gris* dolls. But he got so scared the old guy would sell him out to the Woodlens he had to knock him off.

"When Epp heard about that, I thought he'd bust a gut. Y'see, he wanted to make this a nice, clean job—no rough stuff, or anything like that. Right then and there, he dealt Charley outa the game. That same mornin' he came down here to have a look-see on his own, and left me behind in Sellierville to keep an eye on Charley.

"When Epp came back that afternoon, he told me he was sure Charley had located the spot where the stuff was cached. For the rest of that day, I never let Charley out of my sight. I found out, too, that Monahan was tailin' him. Well, that was all to the good, for I only had to watch Monahan to know what Charley was doin'.

"That night, about eight o'clock, Charley boarded the bus. Monahan hired a taxi and followed. Epp and I heisted a black sedan and followed the taxi. But the sedan was slower than the seven-year itch, and we were left far behind. But we caught up with Charley just as he was leavin' the Woodlen house with that brown, canvas zipper bag. He recognized us, and lit out through the alley. We caught sight of him again as he was leggin' it along the main stem toward the bus stop. He got aboard just as the bus was about to pull out.

"We chased after the bus. But I guess you know all about that. Anyway, when I took Charley off the bus, I had no idea I'd grabbed the dame's bag, because the one Charley had carried out of the Woodlen house looked exactly like it. I forced Charley into the sedan. Epp, who was drivin' took the bag from me and set it on the seat beside him. He drove south for a few miles, then stopped. Then he drew his gun, turned around in his seat and looked me square in the eye.

" 'Frankie,' " he says, " 'Frankie, we've bin a long time together. But right here's where we dissolve partnership. Sorry!'

"Then he raised his gun and let me have it. That's all I remember until I came to and found myself lyin' among the weeds beside the road."

"So," Henry drawled, "he shot you befo' he killed Faunce, yes?"

Galtani shrugged. "Guess that's what happened. Makes me sore as hell to think he'd double-cross me like that, after all the years we've worked together." He looked past Henry toward the doorway leading to the kitchen, his black eyes popping apprehensively as he muttered, "Oh, oh!"

"Please don't bother to turn around, Chief," a buttery voice warned from the unlighted kitchen. "Just do as I say, and you'll probably live to dance at the wedding of your great-grandson."

Henry glanced quickly into the mirror above the buffet. In it he saw the reflection of a hand and arm reaching around the frame of the kitchen door. In the hand was a .38-caliber Police Positive, the muzzle of which was trained on his back.

FOR an instant, Henry thought of going for his gun. But a second glance into the mirror convinced him that he didn't have a chance.

"Hokay," he drawled, "it's yo' move."

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"Wrong!" The newcomer chuckled. "It's yours. Just lay your gun on the table, then raise your hands and walk over to that chair in the opposite corner."

Henry obeyed, wondering what was delaying Jimmy. When he sat down in the corner chair, he looked toward the kitchen door, where Mr. Monahan stood with his gun pointing to the dining-room, his beet-red face lightened in a beatific smile.

"That's just splendid," Mr. Monahan declared. He advanced with his customary dignified stride to the table, picked up both guns and stuck one in each side pocket of his coat. Then he lifted the bag, hefted its weight and murmured, "Ah! We must take the current where it serves, or lose our ventures." He winked jovially. "Right out of Shakespeare."

Henry, who had never heard of Shakespeare, scowled.

"You cain't get away wit' this, ma frien'," he warned.

Mr. Monahan beamed. "How mistaken you are! I have planned for a hasty retreat—a strategic withdrawal, you might say. In Sellierville, I rented a drive-it-yourself car, drove here and parked just down the block. When I leave here, I shall hie myself to the nearest airfield and charter a plane to carry me to St. Louis, where the directors of the Pan-Continental, upon receipt of these precious baubles, will fall on my neck and call me blessed, and with loud hosannahs, strew my path with flowers in the form of good United States currency—forty thousand dollars worth, to be exact."

"And you don't figure nobody else is entitled to a share in the ree-ward, no?" Henry probed, hoping to detain him until Jimmy arrived.

Mr. Monahan winked. "Have you ever tried sitting on a tack? Listen, I once took a town clown into my confidence on a stolen property case in Illinois. He framed me and beat me out of every cent of the reward. I've been shy of small-town cops ever since."

"I still say you cain't get away with it," Henry insisted.

"You are very hard to convince," Mr. Monahan said, frowning. "I've been on the trail of the Odenwald stuff for almost a year. It wasn't hard to run down; all I needed to do was shadow the late and unlamented Mr. Faunce—"

"You mailed them theater tickets to the Woodlens, yes?" Henry probed.

Mr. Monahan beamed. "What brilliant deduction! However, Mr. Faunce was already in the house, having watched the Woodlens leave. I came a cropper there."

He backed slowly toward the doorway to the kitchen. "I must go now. I'll deposit your artillery in the bayou as I cross the bridge out of town. Well, so long, Chief, it's been nice meeting you!"

He stopped suddenly on the threshold, winced as if he had backed into a red-hot stove. His derby hat made a popping sound, like the bursting of an air-filled paper bag. Mr. Monahan took a dive and hit the floor with his face.

"Thass ma boy!" Henry crowed.

Then he stared in sudden dismay at the man who stood in the kitchen doorway. It wasn't Jimmy. He was a man with a pasty face, opaque blue eyes and a bulging waistline. He was the man who had brought the Woodlens to police headquarters the day before—the man who had called himself Tanner.

Henry saw the light. "So," he drawled, "Meestaire Epplee, he has arrive, yes?"

HENRY half rose, sat down again when Eppley swung the muzzle of his Colt automatic to cover him.

"Sit still, copper," the newcomer warned. "Don't rush things." He glared malevolently at Galtani and continued, "I was listenin' outside, while you were spillin' your guts to the town clown."

Galtani glared back. "So what? Sure, I talked to the copper. Why should I clam up, after the way you double-crossed me and tried to rub me out?"

"I got wise that you and Faunce were aimin' to double-cross me," Epply declared. "So I decided to knock you both off. I haven't got any time for explanations, because I've got to make this fast. But I won't do any bum shootin' this time." He looked at Henry and added, "Sorry I have to knock you off, too, copper. But you can do a little prayin' while I rub out this rat."

He raised his automatic and sighted on Galtani.

"Go ahead—shoot, you crummy, double-

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crossin' rat!" Galtani shouted defiantly. "You can only burn once."

Henry averted his gaze and looked longingly at the two guns projecting from the side pockets of Mr. Monahan's coat. With every muscle tense, he waited, expecting at any instant to hear the shot that would send a bullet ripping through Galtani's body. Instead, he heard the other snarl defiantly:

"Okay. Why'n hell don't you shoot?"

Henry looked up at Eppley, whose face was sagging in a gape of dismay, his pistol hand slowly falling to his side.

"He won't do any shooting—ever." The flat, unemotional drawl of Jimmy Bourdelon sounded from the kitchen behind Eppley. "Drop that rod, fella!"

Henry rose as Eppley let his automatic fall to the floor. On quivering knees, he crossed the room and picked up the big Colt, snatched the two six-shooters from Mr. Monahan's pockets and lifted the Police Positive from the floor beside the unconscious man's hand. Laying the guns on the buffet, he took Jimmy's handcuffs and snapped them on Eppley's wrists.

"Hokay. You played it smot, feller. Yes." He drew Eppley across the threshold into the dining room and pushed him toward the table. "Looks lak' y'all got a lotta talking to do, by damn!"

"That'll be me, copper," Galtani promised gleefully. "Believe me, Caruso never sang as loud as I'm goin' to sing when they jerk us before the grand jury." He grinned at Eppley and asked, "And how d'ya like that, rat?"

Eppley's colorless eyes seemed to glow red. His puffy mouth hardened to a thin, red line. He gulped, flicked the tip of his tongue over dry lips and then sagged to a seat in a chair, his forehead beaded with perspiration.

Galtani chuckled maliciously. "Can't take it, eh?"

"Go to hell—all of you!" Eppley snarled. "Nobody has a damn thing on me."

A thought which had lain dormant in Henry's mind for the past thirty-six hours now came to the fore. Fixing Eppley with the "old eagle eye," he accused: "You brought the Woodlens to me yesterday and deliberately threw sospicion on 'em, figuring I'd book 'em fo' murder and leave you free to ransack their house at yo' leisure. Ontil now, I couldn't figure, me, why you were packing that empty brief case."

"You have only the word of this double-crossin' rat—" Eppley began.

"We have more than that," Jimmy interrupted. "I was outside and heard everything you said. You shouldn't brag about murder; you never can tell who might be listening."

Henry chuckled. "Thass right. He tol' plenty on himself, that wan. Yes." He walked over to the buffet and stowed his own gun and the captured weapons inside the waistband of his trousers. "Well, I reckon, me, we got this case all wropped up. Nothing mo' to do, 'cept call the Dugas kids and tell 'em it's now safe to come home."

Glancing into the mirror above the buffet, he saw the plump posterior of Mr. Monahan vanishing into the gloom of the unlighted kitchen as its owner moved on all fours with the soundless agility of a scurrying ant. Reaching the back door, Mr. Monahan sprang to his feet and dashed frantically from the house, hugging the zipper bag to his chest.

"Stop, you!" Jimmy barked, starting toward the living room.

"Hol' yo hoss!" Henry halted him. "It will be mo' fon to let that wan go. Yes."

A SWIFT patter of running footfalls sounded from the dooryard. Henry walked leisurely through the living room, opened the front door and stepped out on the gallery, grinning when he saw Mr. Monahan sprinting toward his parked car at the end of the block, his short, plump legs working with frenzied action of a cyclist pedalling through the final lap of a hotly contested bicycle race.

Reaching his car, Mr. Monahan wrenched open the door and tumbled inside. The slam of the closing door blended with the sudden bellow of the starting motor. The car shot backward from the banquette, whirled on two wheels around the corner and went roaring west toward the bayou, heading out of town with Mr. Monahan and the zipper bag filled with fragments of broken glass.

Henry went indoors, still grinning broadly. "That wan, he was ron so fas' he lean over backward."

Jimmy snickered. "Eh, man! I'll bet he's

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happier now than he'll be when he opens the bag and finds it filled with Odette's fruit jars all broken in little bits."

They led their prisoners outside and escorted them through a succession of back alleys until they reached the town hall. There, they found Andrew Jackson Fortier sitting behind the wheel of his jeep, which was parked in front of the green door.

Catching sight of Galtani, the young deputy scrambled out of his car, laid a heavy hand on the man's shoulder and declared with shrill emphasis:

"You are ma prisoner. Yes."

Henry shouldered him aside. "Has it occurred to yo' massive intelleck that this wan is in ma custody?"

"Thass all right," Old Hickory said. "I'll tak' him off yo' hands." He followed Henry indoors, looked at Eppley in beady-eyed curiosity and asked, "Who this feller is? W'at he was do?"

"The name," Henry informed him solemnly, "is Eppley. The cha'ge, murder, criminal conspiracy and a few mo' trifles."

"Hot damn!" Old Hickory gloated. "That wan, he is red hot. Look, let me ron them fellers over to the parish jail in ma jeep."

Henry grinned cynically as he considered the lamentable results of such magnanimity on his part. Like a certain famous British general, Andrew Jackson Fortier was humble in adversity but insufferable in victory. Henry well knew that before the deputy reached Sellierville with the prisoners he would have devised a scheme whereby he could grab all the credit for Eppley's arrest, credit which rightfully belonged to Jimmy.

"Tomorrow," Henry declared, "Jimmy and I will tak' these prisoners over to Sellierville fo' a talk wit' the D. A. Ontil then, neither you nor any other of Vicou's not too bright young men will have anything to do wit' this case. Now scram outa here befo' I get mad, me, and tear yo' ears off." He pushed Old Hickory into the street.

"That wan," he informed Jimmy, "he came nosing in here tonight, probably aiming to grill Odette about her bag." He told the ex-marine of Old Hickory's sudden departure and then continued, "Reckon Vicou called to tell him Galtani had escaped. But young M'sieu Fortier figured to grab an armful of glory by recapturing Galtani singlehanded. Thass why he ran outa here, without telling me how come. Eh, man! Some tam' that wan's feet are too smart for his haid. Yes."

He ordered Jimmy to take the prisoners back to the lock-up, then sat down in his swivel chair and stared in sudden perplexity at the ink stain on the blotter. Mr. Monahan, he recalled, had mentioned a reward of forty thousand dollars for the recovery of the Odenwald jewelry. Having made up his mind to divide between the Woodlens and the young Dugas couple any reward that might come as a result of the closing of the case, he was determined to keep the promise he had made to himself. But he wasn't sure how Jimmy would take it. Legally and morally, the ex-marine was entitled to a substantial share.

HENRY was still frowning at the blotter when Jimmy returned to the office, after locking the prisoners up for the night.

"You look unhappy, old-timer," the ex-marine remarked in French.

"It's about that reward," Henry explained. "I had planned to split it between the Dugas and the Woodlens. But I neglected to take your feelings into account. *Pardon.*"

"*Pardon?* Why?" Jimmy queried wonderingly. "Of course not! You feared I would object. Odette earned that reward. But I am not so sure that those Woodlens are entitled to a share."

"Why not?" Henry argued. "Those people have been threatened. Their privacy has been invaded, and their house has been broken into and damaged." He grinned sheepishly and continued, "Besides, if anyone in this world deserves a break, it is that brave little Yonkee woman."

Jimmy nodded understandingly. "I agree to whatever you decide. We have enough in the kitty, so that we don't have to worry about the future. Of course, divide the reward between those people. It will be a good deed, and a good deed is never lost."

Henry's broad, tanned face was lighted in a benign smile as he completed the old French proverb: "For a good deed is a loan that always pays heavy interest." He looked up at Jimmy and added in English. "By damn, yes!"

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MEN who wouldn't DIE!

by George C. Appell

Digger Man

WILLIAM E. WINNEKER was sitting at a table in a hut in the Spanish Peaks one night in 1882 when a bullet crashed into his kull.

He recovered consciousness later in the night, got water, and crawled for eleven miles to a stage station where his wound was dressed. He declined further treatment, saying that his probings for gold—for fabulous El Dorado reported found centuries before by Spanish priests—required all his living time. He returned to the hut, head ravaged by pain, and continued to dig. Torrential rains washed the world and carried the top of the hut away, Winneker with it. He struggled back to the small cellar where he kept his samplings, rigged a tarp, and lived through the storms. He contracted what he called "high delirium and much fever and gasping"—which today would be pneumonia. And recovered, did William Winneker, and went on digging. Another shot in the night struck his shoulder. He tracked his assailant halfway to the stage station, overtook him and shot him. The dead man proved to be a former partner, a man who had staked Winneker and thought the digger was cheating him.

Actually, Winneker had dug up less than five hundred dollars assay samples. Back at work, he began taking in more nuggets; and came The Law, wanting an explanation about the shooting. He tried to explain, but The Law was adamant—even in 1882—until it saw the cellarful of nuggets. More time was granted Winneker. A split, perhaps, later. He dug. In the early wet weather of 1883, a landslide gravelled the rebuilt hut, the cellar—and William E. Winneker. He dug out, set his broken arm, and dug with one hand. The Law came back: where was all the gold? Close to ten thousand dollars lay in little canvas sacks, and The Law wanted half. They shot it out; Winneker won, took his sacks on mule-back and faded into Mexico. Afterward, he was acquitted—in absentia—of murder, and lived out his life in Sonora.

He'd won every battle but one: the fight for the Lode of the Spanish Priests. And perhaps it was best that shortly after his death, it was found that he'd been digging—and living—exactly 380 feet from the Lode itself.

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Some Men Relish Playin' Tunes More Than Buildin' Things and Gamblin' in the Ground

GOLDEN TRUMPET

By BEN T. YOUNG

THE still-growing diggings called Iowa Hill was boiling with activity. Carpenters and masons were erecting more log buildings. Before the Adams & Company Express office stood a pack-train loaded with dust and nuggets, ready to set off under armed guard for Sacramento City; and the south bank of the American River was lined with miners each working like a pup at a gopher hole.

There was one exception. Long-shanked Jude Whitiker had no gold colic at all. Jude had a claim and the tools to work it, but he sat leaning against his idle rocker and playing "Shennydore" on his trumpet. He didn't even stop when old Lyman Confer dropped his pick, marched over from his adjoining claim and stood glaring down at him. "Lay off that dam' tootlin'!" Lyman roared.

Jude stopped then. "Godda practice," he

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grinned, emptying the spit-valve on the horn.

"Bah!" Lyman shot a stream of tobacco juice into the gravel which Jude should have been shoveling into the hopper of his rocker. "If you ain't gonna do nothin' but blow that thing why didn't you stay to home in Missouri?"

"'Cause you fetched Olive Anne out here," Jude chuckled. "Had you give us leave to wed back there . . ."

"Glad I didn't!" Lyman snapped. "Come the summer you quit a good steady job on Munger's farm to go off with that circus band, I began to suspicion you were no good; and when you showed up home again and admitted squanderin' a half year's wages on that second-hand cornet——"

"Trumpet," Jude corrected, carefully polishing the glistening instrument with his bandanna.

"Like I've told you many's the time, this here was made by Besson in France. I bet there ain't another one in California."

"Don't give a hoot 'bout that," Lyman said. "When I seen you taggin' us out here I thought maybe you'd steady down and amount to somethin'. But no, by cripes. You fetch along that dam' horn and straightaway start organizin' a band with a lot of other nogood fellers."

"We make money," Jude pointed out. "Got twenty-five dollars each for playin' on the Fourth, and——"

"One day!" Lyman spat. "Most every day I take thirty dollars out'n my claim, and you could do the same if you'd bend your back. Any minute a man might make a strike like that ol' Eli Bell who hit the crevice full o' nuggets yesterday. Now you mind what I say, Jude. You chuck that cornet in the river and get to work, or put Olive Anne out'n your mind for good'n all."

Lyman started off but Jude, the customary smile gone, jumped up and grabbed his arm. "But look, Mr. Confer!" he protested. "All us Whitikers have been musicians clean back to the one who was a fifer in Washington's army. I relish playin' tunes like some men relish buildin' things, or grubbin' in the ground or whatever. Makin' music is good square fun, and—"

He stopped. His spirits began to soar again. Bearing her Pa's noonday lunch, Olive Anne was coming down the slope, and Olive Anne could talk her Pa into or out of most anything.

"Hi, menfolks," she said, whiffing her mite-too-long yellow bangs away from her eyes, and giving Jude a look that made him too weak to lick his upper lip.

"I was jest a-tellin' him," Lyman scolded, taking the basket from her, "that unless he heaves that horn in the river and goes to diggin'—"

"Now, Pa, you look here." Olive Anne folded her arms across her soft young bosom. "Quit naggin' Jude because he'd rather make music than swing a pick. I'm real proud of him and his Iowa Hill Brass Band. Some day, I'll betcha, he'll have a whoppin' big band with uniforms and whatall, maybe in a city."

"Well, you won't be there to see it, young lady."

Smiling that down-on-one-side that almost set men crazy, Olive Anne winked at Jude. "I will so," she declared. "I'm rising eighteen, and when I get there I'll go anywhere with Jude and that trumpet, especially since band-players travel around and live in big places. I don't intend to spend my life in the backwoods."

With a pretty switch of her calico dress she turned and started off. For a moment Lyman glared at Jude. "Mind what I say," he muttered. "Get rid of that blasted cornet else—"

"Trumpet," Jude chortled, carefully slipping it into its green baize case.

SLOWLY Jude ate the salt-rising bread and cold bear-meat he'd brought from the shack where he batched with three other jiggers. Then he fired his pipe and took up his pick. While Lyman Confer was a cantankerous old coot he was Olive Anne's Pa, and there was no use riling him any more than he was already. Having wolfed his lunch, Lyman was again busy as four hound dogs on a scent.

All afternoon Jude loosed the hard bluish clay and gravel, shoveled it into the hopper, poured water on it and rocked. Idly he'd watch the liquid mud flow through the seive and over the cross-wise cleats on the bottom of the rocker, and spill out the open end. Now and again he'd scrape out and put in his buckskin poke the small accumulation of glittering dust that had lodged against

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the cleats. It didn't excite him. He wasn't even thinking about it. He was wondering where he could come by some paper to arrange scores for the saxhorn player who—with his battered horn and tinner's tools—had just arrived from Nevada City.

"How'd you do?" Lyman demanded, appearing suddenly as the sun was settling behind the fir tops.

Jude grinned wearily. "Doggone near ruined my back for a pinch o' dust. This once-you-find-it-twice-you-don't racket is too much of a gamble. I can make more furnishin' music, and have fun to boot."

"Maybe you have fun," Lyman conceded. "But the money ain't steady. You mind what I say, now. Get some callouses on your hands. Olive Anne thinks she can live on love and horn tunes, but I and her Ma know better. Olive Anne likes her vittles, and we aim to see her hitched to a man who'll provide 'em. There's plenty such hereabouts as you well know."

Abruptly Lyman stalked off homeward, and after a bit Jude tucked his trumpet under his arm and followed. *Doggone his pesterin' anyhow,* he fretted. *Can't blame him for makin' sure his daughter gets a good provider, but he can't get it through that ol' gray head that my way of makin' a livin' is as good or better'n his.*

"Hi, Jude! How's ol' Gabriel an' his trumpet?" a miner called from an open doorway as Jude entered the camp's single dusty street; and such greetings continued as he marched past the mingled living-cabins and business establishments. Made him feel right good, having folks know him that way. Just leave him be and some day people all up and down the Coast would know him, like folks back in the States knew Pat Gilmore and his concert band.

WHEN he neared the Confer place, which was better than most because Lyman Confer rode himself as hard as he rode others, Jude straightened his tired back and tugged his wide-brimmed black hat to a cocky angle. While helping her Ma with the housework Olive Anne always had an eye out for Jude, and sure enough she did this evening. She'd brought both big eyes out on the split-log stoop, and Jude at once saw that they showed war.

"Listen, mister," she began as he hauled off his hat. "I just heard that you aim to play music for that bull-and-bear fight tomorrow."

"Sure do," Jude said proudly. "Me'n the boys get ten dollars each."

Olive Anne whiffed the bangs away. "Not you, bub," she declared. "You won't be there. Men who'll arrange such a cruel spectacle, and those who attend it, are no better'n Indians. I'll not have you making such a thing more attractive with your music."

"But I promised!" Jude was stunned like ducks in thunder. "I reckon, come to think of it, that it ain't a-goin' to be a genteel exhibition; and I don't hold with unkindness to animals. But I gave my word to the Mex'kin who's runnin' the show, and—"

"Jude Whitiker!" Mrs. Confer appeared at the open window beside the cookstove. "You go one step inside that so-called Bull Pen tomorrow and you'll never set foot in our home again. That's final. Come in to supper, Olive Anne."

WITH quicksteps continually prancing through his head, Jude usually marched to where he was going, marched like a drum-major; but now he slouched along home in the manner of a dejected old workhorse. What to do? He didn't mind not earning the ten dollars. Money meant little to him. And to please Olive Anne he would willingly forego the pleasure of playing. But, doggone it, he'd given his word to Juan Gonzago who was staging the fight.

When he shambled into the shack his three *compadres* left off what they were doing and stared at him. "You sick yet?" Dutch Steuernagel asked, putting his beloved flügelhorn on the shelf above his bunk.

"Kinda," Jude admitted, avoiding the sharp eyes of George Bennet who stood by the roaring stove with an iron spoon in one hairy paw.

"Woman trouble, I bet," old Ned Treadway said morosely as he honed away on a chisel out of his chest of carpenters' tools. "There's dam' little grief in life that don't start with a woman. I had me one once and she'd sure been in the lead when tongues was give out. That's how come I took up bass drummin' as a side-line to drown out her naggin'."

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Bennet was again stirring the stew. "Well, fergit it, Jude," he advised. "Tomorrow we have fun and earn ten bucks the easy way."

"Maybe I won't," Jude said, looking out the open window into the gathering dusk. "Maybe I'll hunt up Gonzago and tell him you boys will play without me."

"I knowed it," Treadway growled, spitting on his whetstone. "That Confer gal has stuck her oar in. And if you don't play the rest of us can't because a band without—"

"Dutch can play the trumpet part on his flügelhorn," Jude countered meekly. "I won't be missed."

"You will so, Jude." Bennet began to dish out the stew. "Your triple-tonguin' on that trumpet is attractin' attention around these parts. Without you, the band won't be nothin' at all. You're breakin' your promise to Gonzago, disappointin' the audience that's countin' on some good music as well as the fight, and lettin' us band boys down as well. Them that's married need the money. I'd like to wrap that clarinet o' mine around your Olive Anne's neck."

"Like as not her folks put her up to it because tomorrow's Sunday," Treadway sniffed.

"She says it's a cruel spectacle," Jude corrected.

"Mebbe 'tis," Treadway conceded. "But your not playin' won't stop it. Leave me tell you somethin', Jude. I reckon you aim to marry her come hell or high water, don't you?"

Leaning slackly against the doorjamb and staring at the dirt floor, Jude nodded miserably.

"All right." Preparatory to eating his supper Treadway tossed his chew of tobacco into the fire and banged down the stove lid. "A man's got to make it clear right from the start that his wife's fambly can't plan his life or reg'late his conduct. You go ahead and play at that fight, Jude, or your life won't be worth livin'."

"I may lose her for good'n all," Jude protested.

"Oh, no!" Dutch wagged his head and lit the candle on the table. "You Americans do not understand women yet. When I was in Berlin, playing in the regimental band of the Kaiser Franz Grenadiers, there was a girl—"

"Olive Anne's no meek foreign woman," Jude snapped, straddling the empty keg that was his seat at the table. "She's American as corn whiskey, and like corn whiskey she can't be fooled with without bad results."

FOR once Jude couldn't eat. All evening, all night, he fidgeted like a caged fox. By morning he felt like the frazzled end of a misspent life, but he'd made up his mind. He would lead his band as planned. The biased advice of his friends had nothing to do with it.

He was keeping a promise.

Soon after dinner the band boys, all ten of them, began assembling in the stump-dotted street before the shack. Save for sweat-stained shirts of red flannel, and dusty cowhide boots, there was no uniformity in their dress. Some were bearded, some were not; and they wore all manner of battered hats and baggy trousers.

Antoine Picard and his snare drum stood out just a little. Antoine's black curly hair was topped with a soiled chapeau ornamented by a wool pompon, relics of his days in France.

For once the tentative tapping of drums, the squealing little scales on the woodwinds, and the impolite noises that brass horn players make while warming up their mouthpieces, failed to excite Jude. His heart was heavy as a load of wet hay. "Line up," he ordered listlessly. "We'll give 'em Number One while marchin' over."

Number One was "Washington's March" and after the drums had sounded off they moved out. When passing the Confer place Jude flung an apprehensive sidelong glance, but it was closed and blank-looking as a meeting-house on a Monday.

"*Bueno, señores,*" Gonzago beamed as, halted at the wide gateway of the newly-completed Bull Pen, they reached the crash-bang ending of the march. "One more little tune out here, please, to bring more peoples."

"Oh, Susanna," sure enough brought more peoples, the adult males among them eventually following the band inside after surrendering their pinches of dust to a fat-fingered Mexican at the gate.

"Great Scott," Treadway puffed when the *musicos* were settled in their ringside seats and had a chance to look around. "Close onto two thousand here. Must be

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all of Bird's Flat and Wisconsin Hill come over."

Morosely Jude nodded, and after he'd got his outfit started blowing and pounding the guts out of "Rio Grande," he turned to eye the crowd over the bell of his trumpet. The smoking, chewing, drinking *hombres* were from all over the globe. There were Chinamen and blacks. There were sailors who had jumped ship in San Francisco to try their luck at digging; and there were clod-hoppers from the farms and sports from Broadway.

Directly across from Jude four *vaqueros* with ropes were having some difficulty holding a bellowing pawing Spanish bull which looked meaner than a basket of snakes. Almost under Jude's feet was the top of the cage housing the grizzly bear, a six-hundred-pounder captured the week before up yonder near Donner Lake. If all reports were true (though maybe they'd been started by Gonzago to swell the crowd) the beast was more dangerous than thawed dynamite. It didn't somehow seem smart to Jude to let such a thing loose again; or the bull either, for that matter. But a man who had attended a like affair in Sacramento City had assured him that the audience was safe as the congregation in a church, that the antagonists were so intent on taking each other apart that they paid the onlookers no heed whatsoever. For the spectators' sake Jude hoped that was true.

"Please, *señores*, play more, Gonzago urged, and they obliged with "Shennydore" and "Louisiana Belle," both of which brought yells of appreciation.

"Hi, Whitiker, let's have 'Laura Lee,' someone shouted. "Do some o' that triple-tonguin'. A stranger here wants you should."

As a trumpet solo with band accompaniment Jude turned in a top-notch performance. He was just in the mood. Standing, staring up at the blue sky, he threaded sobbing notes like tears and strained honey through the deeper pattern of sound.

After he'd taken his bow and sat down, Gonzago appeared in the ring, swept off his steeple-crowned sombrero and raised his hands for silence. He made a spiel to which Jude, with chin sunk to his chest, paid no attention. The mental turmoil, combined with the odors of bear, hot unwashed humans, bust-head whiskey and tobacco smoke, was making his insides a little uneasy. Finally the voice ceased and there was an expectant silence. Jude raised his eyes.

CASTING their loops off the bull the *vacqueros* pulled foot pronto. Two miners atop the bear's cage hauled up the gate and high-tailed it. The bear ambled out, and for a moment the two beasts stood regarding each other with obvious disfavor tinged with some apprehension.

Lowering his wide-spread horns the bull took an experimental step forward, watching the effect with red-eyed interest. Rising to its hind legs the bear loosed a growl. Then, all at once and nothing first, hell let out for recess. Quicker than powder the bear whirled, leaped atop its cage, and started out through the band; or where the band had been but an instant before.

Instinctively tucking the trumpet under his arm Jude moved ten feet in one sidewise spring. As he lit in a space just then vacated by the local representatives of Wells Fargo Express, he could feel each of his hairs standing up like quills on a vexed porcupine. Plainly the rest of the assemblage (including the bear) was similarly affected, for it was off as though to a rummage sale of Tiffany's diamonds.

Having stepped into the overturned bass drum the bear kicked it backward onto the right-behind horns of the bull. Two jumps ahead of the bear the former Kaiser Franz Grenadier and the erstwhile Republican Guard were in a neck-and-neck race for elsewhere and not looking back one time.

Jude went too, because the bear might change its course; and Jude had no assurance that the loop a mounted *vaquero* was twirling would latch onto the bull which probably disliked red shirts. Jude passed pot-bellied Treadway still clutching his cymbal and drumstick. He tripped over the saxhorn and tuba abandoned by their owners. He overtook clarinetist Bennet showing more steam than a young mule colt.

His eyes standing out on stems, Bennet saw a cabin roof ahead and seemed to step up onto it without effort. Jude did likewise, but he stopped and Bennet didn't. Bennet legged it right on as though he'd merely crossed a hummock.

Astride the ridgepole Jude examined his

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trumpet. Miraculously it was not even dented. Just as he loosed a sigh of relief a close-by scream almost raised his already twitching scalp. Startled, he stood up, lost his footing and fell. Down the slick shingles he skidded like an oiled eel.

During the instant he was between the eaves and the ground he glimpsed the bear almost beneath him. Only by a mid-air wriggle did he avoid landing on it. Hitting the ground upright but faced in the wrong direction, he stood frozen with astonishment.

Flatter than a wet leaf old Eli Bell stood plastered against the cabin wall. His shoulder was clawed. Standing upright the bear was on the point of making another pass at him. It sure looked as though Eli's recently-found crevice full of nuggets was no good to now, save for paying for burial.

Though his teeth were rattling like a box of dice, Jude stepped forward and swung his trumpet at the bear's snout. It landed with a smack that forever wrecked its delicate slides and valves and pistons.

With a howl the bear lost interest in Eli, grabbed its muzzle and lit out for Indian Canyon. Eli, his face the color of an old drumhead, collapsed like a dropped rope.

NOW that the bear was gone and the bull caught, the less terrified humans began to reappear. Among the first were the Confers, the missis bearing the first-aid materials she always grabbed at the first news of a mishap. Kneeling beside Eli, whom Jude had straightened out, she scissored off his shredded sleeve. "The old rip's more scared than hurt," she reported. "Olive Anne, hand me that balsam."

Eli cracked his eyelids to see who was talking, then let on he hadn't come to.

Hunkered down against the wall Jude was staring at the ground. First he'd lost his girl, now he had no trumpet.

Shortly he was aware that a pair of varnished boots had appeared within his vision. They were city-man's boots, topped by an elegant pair of cassinette trousers. Letting his listless gaze stray upward Jude saw the long skirts of a black coat, saw a white shirt and choke-rope necktie, and finally a shrewd lean face adorned with a silky mustache. "I am Blythe Biddison of San Francisco," the man announced.

"How do," Jude said politely, getting to his feet.

"Being in the vicinity on business I happened to hear your band today. Your performance on the trumpet was extraordinary."

"I'm obliged," Jude mumbled.

"San Francisco needs a band," Biddison stated flatly. "We can well support a forty-to-sixty-piece organization for parades, variously celebrations, a series of concerts and the like. I believe you're the man to organize and conduct it. As one of the civic leaders I am offering you the opportunity, and will guarantee financial backing. The city will supply uniforms, music, and whatever else is needed. Will you come?"

Jude's lower jaw had dropped till he almost stepped on it. Everyone had lost interest in Eli Bell and was staring at Jude. He saw Dutch and Antoine and Treadway and Bennet. They looked so forlorn that Jude shook his head. "Can't leave these boys flat," he gulped.

"Bring any that will come," Biddison persisted.

"Remember that you've busted your horn," Lyman Confer warned. "And because you ain't worked hard you're missin' the chance of a lifetime to get ahead in the world, because I bet you ain't got 'nough money ot buy another."

"Jude," Eli Bell said, suddenly sitting up, "you busted that horn a-savin' my life and I'm grateful. Take your pick o' these nuggets in this here money-belt. Ain't a one of 'em worth a cent less'n five thousand dollars. Send off to France fer 'nother one o' them horns, and marry this Olive Anne Confer who can't keep her eyes off you. Now—"

"Mister," Olive Anne blurted, confronting Biddison, whiffing her bangs and handing him that twisted smile. "If you've no objections to a married band-leader, we'll accept your offer."

Having snatched off his hat, Biddison bowed. "No objection whatsoever," he said. "But—" He looked over her shoulder at Jude.

Jude's eyeballs could have been knocked off with a board. He was grinning like a baked possum as he nodded. "It sure is so that gold is where you find it," he chortled.

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It Was Black John Smith's Solemnly Declared Theory That When a Woman Was Good Looking—Well, She Just Couldn't Be a Liar!

PERMANENT RESIDENT ON HALFADAY

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

I

ONE morning early in September Black John stepped through the doorway and crossed to the bar of Cushing's Fort, the combined trading post and saloon that served the little community of outlawed men that had sprung up on Halfaday Creek, close against the Yukon-Alaska border, as Old Cush, the proprietor, shoved aside the month-old newspaper he had been reading and set out a bottle, two glasses, and the leather dice box. Black John won in straight horses, and when the glasses were filled Cush folded the newspaper and laid it on the back bar. "I seen a piece in the paper there, where some preacher name of Billy Sunday built him a tuberkle an' converted three thousan', six hundred an' seventy-three folks in three weeks in Chicago. By God, what I claim, that's good convertin', even fer a town like Chicago!"

Black John nodded. "Yeah, I read that

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piece. It give the attendance figures, the cost of the tabernacle, an' also the amount of the collection. I got out my pencil an' done a little figurin' an' found out that Billy made a net profit of three dollars an' sixty-two cents per soul. Which, when you come to think about it, ain't bad for three weeks of gymnastical devil-baitin'. Well—every man to his own racket." He paused and glanced at some penciled sheets that lay just beyond the newspaper. "Looks like you be'n doin' a little figurin' yourself."

Cush shook his head. "No, I wouldn't give a damn what souls is worth in Chicago. Them figgers is what I need to winter through on. I be'n goin' through my stock the last couple of days an' on top of four bar'ls of licker, I gotta have a lot of pants, an' shirts, an' blankets, an' underwear, an' a hell of a lot of groceries. An' I've got to git 'em up here before the freeze-up. Boat-freightin' is a damn sighter cheaper than dog-freightin'. I'm tellin' you, runnin' a tradin' post way out here, a man's got his troubles.

"Take it like them places where I tended bar in Cincinnati an' Seattle—cripes, there wasn't hardly a day but what some licker er beer salesman didn't come in, settin' up free drinks fer the house, an' houndin' you fer an order. An' when you give 'em an order an' the stuff come, it was delivered an' tuk right down cellar where you wanted it.

"But, up here, they ain't no travelin' men to take yer order, an' no railroad to haul the stuff in, so I gotta go clean down to Dawson an' buy what I need an' then dicker with a bunch of damn pirates to git it delivered, an' some of it's allus gittin' dropped in the river an' lost er spoilt."

THE big man grinned. "Standin' around belly-achin' about it don't do no good. Hell if I felt the way you do about it, I'd take a trip outside an' get in touch with the right parties, an' promote a railroad connectin' Halfaday Crick with Chicago an' all way p'ints. An' I'd stop in an' arrange with the wholesalers to have their travellin' men drop in on us occasionally. Cripes, the boys would appreciate a free drink now an' then, when one of them licker salesmen hit the crick."

"Huh," Cush grunted, "the kind of travellin' men that shows up on Halfaday could keep right on travellin' fer all of me. But gittin' back to this here stuff I need—me an' you's got to take a trip to Dawson, an' do it damn quick. The freeze-up'll hit us next month."

"Why rope me in on it? You know the way to Dawson as well as I do."

"Yeah, I know the way all right. But you know damn well I ain't no good in a canoe alone. I can't run them rapids, an' I ain't stout enough to pack the canoe around 'em. Besides that, we gotta take a bunch of dust down to the bank. The safe's gittin' clogged up with it. An' besides that, you'd ort to set in the stud game nights down to the Tivoli an' git back them three thousan' dollars them sourdoughs tuk you fer the last time you was down. An' besides that—"

"Hold on, Cush!" the big man interrupted. "The cogent reasonin' an' logical presentation of yer case percludes the necessity of further enumeration—"

"Yeah, an' further 'numeration of a lot of big words ain't gittin' you nothin', neither. So you slip over to yer cabin an' throw yer other shirt in yer pack whilst I send the klooch to fetch One Armed John to run the place whilst we're gone. All I'm hopin' is you don't run onto some good-lookin' woman down there that'll take you fer all you've got."

Black John smiled. "The contacts I've had with good-lookin' women haven't hurt me any, so far. In fact, on several occasions they've proved financially very profitable."

"Yeah, but you be'n lucky. An' you know damn well luck like that can't hold. One of 'em's goin' to take you one of these times—an' don't you fergit it! Tellin' you about me, I'm through with all of em. Them first three wives of mine run me ragged. I'm damn lucky to be alive, even—what with one of 'em wearin' a stiletto strapped to her leg, an' another one soakin' flypaper in under the bed! Time a man's had four wives, like I've had, an' only one of 'em worth a damn, he's learnt that when it comes to wimmin, the odds ain't right! I'm givin' you fair warnin', John—an' I'm givin' it to you free. But if yer goin to be pig-headed about it, an' fall fer every good-lookin' woman you see—why then

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you'll learn about 'em the hard way—like I done."

II

THE trip to Dawson was made without incident. After securing a couple of rooms at the hotel, Cush attended to his business with the big commercial companies, while Black John loafed about town fraternizing with the sourdoughs. He dropped into police detachment for a chat with Corporal Downey, to find Constable Rollo Buck, a rookie whose inflated ego was a source of constant amusement to the sourdoughs, seated behind Corporal Downey's flat-topped desk. "Why, hello, Rollo!" he greeted, eyeing the officer with an amused grin.

"What do you want?" the younger man snapped.

"Nothin'. Just stopped in to chaw the fat with Downey."

"Well, Corporal Downey's not here. He and Constable Peters are up the McQuesten investigating a reported murder. I'm in command of detachment until Downey's return."

"H-u-u-m. When you headin' for Halfaday?"

"What?"

"Well, I rec'lect that time I found you camped on that p'int upriver a piece, gnawin' on a chunk of loon that you thought was duck, after missin' a couple of shots at a moose, an' then goin' off half-cocked an' arrestin' the wrong Siwash on that trap-stealin' complaint—I rec'lect you claimed that as quick as you got in command of the detachment here, the first thing you'd do you'd hit out for Halfaday Crick an' clean up Black John Smith an' that bunch of outlaws that's reported to hang out up there. I was just wonderin' when you figured on startin' in on us."

The rookie's face flushed and his eyes narrowed. "My time will come—don't forget that. Just because Corporal Downey sees fit to leave you unmolested, is no sign I will. At present, I'm only in temporary command here. My orders are to stay right here until Corporal Downey returns."

Black John's grin widened, as he eyed the other appraisingly. "Yer uniform's all spick an' span, an' yer shoes are shined nice, Rollo," he approved. "An' I s'pose Downey figures as long as you stay in the office you can't make many mistakes. But at that, you look quite a bit narrow acrost the hips to fill Downey's chair right—quite a bit narrow between the ears, too. Well, so long, sonny—good luck to you. An' whenever you get ready to invade Halfaday, come on up an' I'll buy you a drink." Turning on his heel he stepped from the room with Constable Buck's angry retort ringing in his ears.

At suppertime, as they waited to be served in the hotel dining room, Cush eyed Black John whose glance kept straying to a young woman and a little boy seated at a nearby table. "There you go," he said in an undertone, "jest like I said—if they's a good-lookin' woman shows up somewheres you don't look at nothin' else."

The big man smiled. "Well, cripes, Cush—look around you. That old-timer over there in the corner ain't much to look at, what with needin' a clean shirt, an' a shave, an' a haircut. An' the sprinklin' of cheechakos scattered around at the other tables shore ain't no hell of a sight. Besides, there's an air of tragedy about that young woman that rather intrigues me."

"She'll do a damn sight wors't than that, onct she gits her hooks into you," Cush growled. "I s'pose now, you won't be settin' in no stud game, tonight."

Black John ignored the jibe. "Yes, sir—if I ever saw sadness an' misery in a woman's eyes it's in hers."

Cush gave a contemptuous snort. "The sadder an' more miserable they look the more they kin take you fer. That there first wife of mine—she was the saddest lookin' woman I ever seen. She looked so damn miserable I up an' married her—an' after that, up to the time I got shet of her, by God it was me that was miserable—not her!"

A waitress brought in the food and the meal proceeded in silence. At its conclusion Cush glanced across the table. "Be you goin' to play stud, tonight—er ain't you?"

"Why shore I am."

"Let's be gittin' over to the Tivoli, then. I'm goin' to cash in around midnight. I got a hard week ahead of me, what with

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pickin' out all that stuff I need, an' then findin' a crew to freight it up to the fort."

Shortly after midnight the two quit the game and, returning to the hotel, sought their rooms. For a half-hour or more before he fell asleep, Black John lay in bed and listened to the sound of muffled sobbing that reached his ears through the thin partition between his room and the next. "It's that young woman," he muttered to himself. "She's in some kind of trouble, all right. It's too damn bad—what with that little kid, an' all."

IN THE morning he awoke and glanced at his watch. "Seven o'clock," he muttered. "What the hell does anyone do in Dawson at seven o'clock in the mornin'? I was a damn fool to quit the game early, last night, just because Cush did. If I'd have played on till four or five o'clock, I'd have slept till noon."

Swinging his feet to the floor, he dressed, washed, and descended the stairs to find the young woman and the little boy the sole occupants of the dining-room. Hesitating only a moment, he stepped into the room, crossed to her table, and smiled down into her upraised eyes. "Good mornin', ma'm," he said. "I noticed you an' the little fella in here last evenin', an' I couldn't help but feel that you're in trouble of some kind. Then, when I went to my room soon after midnight, I could hear someone cryin' in the next room—an' I can see by your eyes this mornin' that it must have be'n you. Of course, it's none of my business, ma'm—an' if I'm talkin' out of turn, just tell me so. But the fact is, I sort of know my way around in this country, an if I could help you out in any way, I'd shore be proud to do it."

For a long moment the woman's gaze centered upon the kindly gray eyes that smiled down at her from above the heavy black beard. Then, suddenly, she spoke. "Oh, I am in trouble," she said, "terrible trouble. But I—there isn't anything anyone can do about it, but the police—and—somehow the policeman there at the post doesn't inspire me with much confidence."

White teeth flashed behind the black beard as the big man smiled. "No, ma'm, Rollo ain't no inspirin' sight, anyways you look at him. If Corporal Downey was here, or Constable Peters, it would be different. But they're both off on a long patrol. At that, ma'am, it's be'n my experience that things generally look worse than they really are. An' when they get so bad they can't get no worse, there's always a change for the better. S'pose I just set down here an' while we're eatin' our breakfast, you can tell me about it. Police, er no police, I think I can promise to be more help to you than Rollo."

Hardly had he seated himself, than Cush stepped into the room, paused abruptly in the doorway, scowled as he eyed the three, advanced into the room and without a word, seated himself at the next table and buried his face in a newspaper.

A waitress appeared from the kitchen and paused beside the table. Black John glanced up at her. "Couple of big thick steaks, couple dozen pancakes, plenty of butter an' syrup an' coffee." He glanced across at the woman. "What does the little fella like?" he asked.

"Oh, he just takes cereal of some kind, and milk, if they have it."

"Okay, sister," he said to the waitress, "fetch in a big dish of cereal, an' a quart er so of milk—an' real cow's milk, what I mean—nothin' out of a can. An' tell the cook to fry my steak damn near raw, an' find out how the lady likes hers."

As the girl turned away, the woman cleared her throat, nervously. "We lived in Colorado—my husband, and little Freddie, and I. He was a mining engineer, and he became involved in a venture that failed to pay out. He had sunk every cent we had in it and when the vein faulted out, we were busted flat. The men with whom my husband was associated realized that it was through no fault of his that the venture failed. They had every confidence in his honesty and his ability, and when he told them of another proposition he knew of that could be developed, they agreed to go in on it, provided my husband would put twenty thousand dollars of his own in. As I said, we were broke, so my husband told them he would try to raise the money within a year. He scraped together every cent he could get hold of and we came to Dawson, arriving here early this spring. My husband realized that trying to locate a good

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placer claim was a long shot—but it seemed the only way possible to get so much money.

"When we reached here, he bought a good tent, and the things necessary for me to keep house in it. We pitched it on the edge of town, then he got a prospecting outfit, gave me all the money he had left, and hit off up the Klondike.

"Two months later he came back. He had located a promising claim on a small feeder, and had sold it for twenty-five thousand dollars to a man named George Ingram, who was working a proposition on a nearby creek. Ingram said he could spare only fifteen thousand dollars at the time, but would pay the balance in September. Inquiry among some sourdoughs up the Klondike developed that George Ingram's word was as good as his bond, so my husband took his check for fifteen thousand. When he presented it here at the bank, it was honored without question, and the bank officials also vouched for Ingram's integrity."

Black John nodded. "That's right, ma'm. I know George Ingram well. If he promises a thing, he'll do it, come hell or high water."

"So my husband stayed here in Dawson, waiting for September. About three weeks ago, he came home and picked up his prospecting outfit. He said he had run across a fellow who, hearing he was a mining engineer, wanted his opinion on a hard-rock proposition he had run onto somewhere back in the mountains." The woman paused, her voice faltered, and her eyes filled with tears. "Ten days later some men brought the body of my husband back to Dawson. They found it lodged among some rocks at the foot of a rapid. They also found pieces of the canoe, and my husband's pack."

"What become of the other fella—the one he went out with?"

"No one seems to know. The men found only the body of my husband."

"What fer lookin' was this other man?"

"I don't know. I never saw him. Then, just yesterday, Mr. Ingram came to see me. He had heard of my husband's death, and expressed deep sorrow. He told me he owed him ten thousand dollars, and had come to pay it. He asked me if I intended to remain here in Dawson, or return to the States."

IT THEN developed that the widow had told Ingram that she intended to take the first boat for the Outside. This was consistent with previous plans of her husband's—he had thought that as soon as he had collected his ten thousand dollars he would head back for Colorado and put the money in a hard-rock proposition.

From then on the story was somewhat confused. Ingram had pointed out to the engineer that if he were paid the ten thousand in gold, rather than cash, he could make a nice profit by cashing in the gold at the mint where it would bring twenty dollars and sixty-seven cents an ounce. In Dawson it was only worth sixteen dollars. The widow said her husband had jumped at the chance, figuring that the extra ounces would net him a clear profit of some twenty-nine hundred dollars.

Later on, after her husband's death—Ingram had told the woman that she could make even more by cashing in her deposited money for more gold dust, and she had agreed—without much hesitation, it seemed, though she did say something about having seen the royalty receipt issued by the policeman at detachment for the gold ounces she had received.

She had actually drawn fifteen thousand dollars out of the bank and paid the man after he had piled the gold in her tent in ten small sacks of nuggets.

"I found out that a steamboat was due upriver this afternoon," the widow continued, "so yesterday I sold the tent, and all my things, and carried the sacks to my room in the hotel. Then I went to the bank to draw what small balance I had left, and found that it amounted to only sixty dollars, which, with what I had realized from the sale of our belongings was not enough to pay our expenses back home. So I went to my room, and took some of the nuggets from one of the sacks, figuring to cash them at the bank for enough to meet our requirements." The woman paused, and again tears flooded her eyes. "It was then I found out that I had been swindled. The men at the bank examined the nuggets and told me they were iron pyrites—worthless rock, known as fool's gold.

"I hurried to the police detachment and reported the matter, and the young police-

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man on duty there—the same one who had weighed in the nuggets and issued a gold royalty receipt for it—seemed rather cross about it—as though it were my fault, or something. He made some notes, and said the police would take the matter up, but, as the man had a day's start, it would probably be a long time before they could catch up with him."

BLACK JOHN nodded. "Yes, mam—it would be a long time before Rollo would catch up with him—a mighty long time. But I've got a hunch," he added grimly, "that when Downey comes back an' hears about this deal, it'll be a long time before anyone catches up with Rollo—the way he'll be goin'. No policeman with a brain in his head, but what would have known them sacks wasn't filled with gold, just by the weight of 'em."

"But," continued the woman, "you can see what a terrible position it places me in. Here we are, Freddie and I, stranded in Dawson, with no place to go, and only a few dollars to our name—and seemingly no chance for the police to get my money back from that swindler before the freeze-up." Her voice faltered and broke. "You said a while ago that things generally looked worse than they are—what could be worse than that?"

The big man smiled. "Now don't go losin' your nerve, ma'm. Things could be a lot worse. You've got your health. An' you've got your little boy. An' you've got them nuggets George Ingram gave you."

"Yes—but the men at the bank said they are worthless."

"Well, now—just because some men happens to work in a bank it don't necessarily mean that they know everything. In fact, I can rec'lect one banker that I had some dealin's with, not long ago, that proved to be plumb dumb about business matters. Them men at the bank might be wrong about them nuggets. An' maybe I was sort of malignin' Rollo, too. Maybe them nuggets are gold, after all. An' by the way, ma'm—what fer lookin' man is this George Ingram?"

"Why, he is a tall, dark man, with a sort of twitch in his eyes when he talks. But—I thought you said you knew him."

"Oh, shore, I know George, all right. I just wanted to make shore it was him that give you them nuggets for your husband's money."

"But of course—it must have been Mr. Ingram! Who else would give them to me? Who else would know about the deal?"

Black John nodded. "That's so, ma'm. Who would? You know I'd like to have a look at them nuggets, myself—not all of 'em—a handful would do. I've had quite a bit of experience with gold—prob'ly more than them clerks in the bank has. You said you packed 'em up to your room. Would you mind fetchin' a handful of 'em down here?"

"Why, certainly not! I'll go and get them, right now!"

As she disappeared, Cush, who had been an avid listener behind the newspaper that shielded his face, lowered the paper, and eyed Black John. "Quite a song an' dance she give you, wa'n't it? She's a damn good looker, too. By God, I'll bet you ten ounces, even money, she hooks you good an' proper! Any good-lookin' woman kin!"

"I'll take that bet."

"Huh—her claimin' George Ingram is a tall dark guy which his eyes twitches, when you know damn well George is short, an' light-haired an' them big blue eyes of his'n never twitched in their life!"

"That's so, Cush," Black John admitted. "Funny, I didn't rec'lect that. But—shut up! Here she comes!"

THE woman resumed her seat, and laid a handful of metallic-looking lumps on the table. Black John examined them minutely, one by one as the woman watched him breathlessly. Presently he met her burning gaze with a smile. "You say the boat leaves for upriver today?"

"Yes, the *Hannah*. She is due to leave shortly after noon."

"Well, ma'm—you can catch her, if you want to. Them bank clerks was wrong. An' Rollo was right in collectin' the royalty an' issuin' that receipt. This is the real stuff, all right—an' I'll be glad to take it off your hands. I'm afraid you'll have to forget the profit you expected to make, because I can only pay you sixteen dollars an ounce—just what it's worth here. But that'll give you your twenty-five thousan'—just what George paid for the claim."

"You mean," cried the woman, her eyes

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wide with unbelief, "that this is really gold! And that you will pay me the money for it?"

Black John's smile widened. "I shore wouldn't pay no sech price for anything else but gold. I'll step over to the bank an' get the cash, an' you write out an assignment to me, John Smith, of the ten-thousan'-dollar balance George Ingram owed your husband."

"But—Mr. Ingram has already paid the debt, and I gave him a receipt in full."

"That's all right, ma'm. The assignment is only a matter of form. You can see for yourself that if George holds your receipt for the money, he shore ain't goin' to pay it again."

"That's so," the woman agreed. "I have a pen and paper in my room. I'll write out the assignment and have it ready when you get back from the bank." Gathering up the nuggets, she stepped from the room, followed by the little boy.

WHEN they had gone Cush frowned his disapproval. "Whilst yer over to the bank you better draw out them ten ounces, over an' above the twenty-five thousan'. My God—of all the damn fools I ever seen, you take the cake! Any good-lookin' woman kin take you fer anythin' she wants to. All she's got to do is look sad, an' jerk out a tear er two, an' tell some kind of a hard-luck story, an' you fall fer it, an' dig down an' shove her a bundle of bills! An' what the hell you gittin' out of it—with her hittin' fer the outside on the next boat?"

"Why, Cush, I'm gettin' the satisfaction of helpin' out a poor woman who was in trouble. Just think of her an' that little kid havin' to winter through in Dawson without no money to speak of. But about them ten ounces you mentioned. I ain't payin' that bet yet."

"Ain't payin' it! Say, ain't she jest took you fer twenty-five thousan'?"

Black John shook his head. "Not that I know of, she ain't. I won't know till I get an assay on them nuggets."

"An assay! Any damn fool kin see there ain't a grain of gold in a ton of that damn stuff!"

The big man grinned. "Yeah—but that's the trouble, Cush. I ain't a damn fool—so I can't see it like you do."

Proceeding to the bank, he drew out the cash, and returned to the hotel where he handed it to the woman in the lobby, and pocketed the assignment of the debt. Before accepting it, she glanced into his eyes. "But the gold—it's in my room. I'd rather you would step up there and see it, before I take the money."

"Oh, that's all right, ma'm. I know it'll be there when I want it. I know you wouldn't lie about it. Here—take the money—an' just remember what I told you—things generally look worse than they are."

"I'll certainly never forget that!" she beamed. "And—oh, just think—if you hadn't chanced upon me here and realized that I was in trouble, I might have believed those men in the bank, and thrown all that gold away!"

Black John nodded solemnly. "That's right, ma'm," he agreed. "You shore might. An' now, ma'm, if I was you, I'd take out what money you need for expenses, an' go over to the bank an' buy a draft on Seattle for the rest of it. It's a long trip outside, an' a rough one, an' twenty-five thousan' is quite a bit of cash for a woman to be packin'. There's too many doubtful characters scattered along the trail for you to take a chanct."

"I'll do just that," the woman replied, "and there are no words that will ever thank you enough for what you have done for me—and for Freddie. Only think of it, Mr. Smith—this morning I was in the very depths of despair. And now——"

"You don't owe me no thanks, ma'm. What I done ain't cost me a cent. You've got the cash, an' I've the gold. It's all the same." He paused and thrust out his hand. "Goodbye, ma'm—an' good luck to you—an' the little fella, too."

The woman took the hand and pressed it warmly. "Goodbye," she said. "I think you are a grand person." Drawing slightly closer she glanced toward Cush, who stood leaning against the desk apparently absorbed in studying the register. "Speaking of doubtful characters—if I were you I'd keep an eye on that man over there. He was seated at the next table during breakfast, and although he pretended to be absorbed in his newspaper, I got the impression that he was listening to every word I said. He may be waiting for a

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chance to make away with all that gold."

The big man followed her glance, and nodded solemnly. "Yes, ma'm," he agreed, in a voice that carried across the room, "he is a mighty doubtful-lookin' character, at that. Thanks for the tip. I'll keep an eye on him, all right. If anyone was to make off with that gold, they'll be sorry they done it —yes, ma'm—they shore will."

As the woman and little boy left the hotel and started for the bank, Black John sauntered over to the desk where Cush greeted him sourly. "So now yer a grand person, eh? Why the hell wouldn't you be? Anyone that was damn fool enough to fork over twenty-five thousan' in cash to me fer a hundred pound of purty colored rocks, I'd claim they was a grand person, too."

"She warned me against you, spotting you as a doubtful character, thus proving herself to be a young woman of extraordinary discernment and keen intuition in the analysis of human characteristics."

"Huh," Cush grunted, "if all them big words means she proved herself to be a damn slick article like all wimmin is, then I guess yer right. I gotta go over to the A. C. store, now an' git to work on them supplies. If I was you I'd hit over to the Tivoli an' set in a stud game an' try to git part of them twenty-five thousan' dollars back."

III

SHORTLY before the noon hour Black John stepped into the Tivoli saloon and joined the little group of sourdoughs at the bar. "Fill 'em up," he invited, tossing a poke onto the bar. "Anyone seen George Ingram lately?"

Swiftwater Bill nodded. "Yeah. He's up the Klondike workin' a location he bought off'n some minin' engineer that come in this spring an' hit it lucky on a feeder."

"He's the same fella Burr MacShane an' Henderson found floatin' around dead in that big eddy at the foot of them first rapids on Big Spruce," Bettles explained.

"If you want to see George," Swiftwater continued, "all you got to do is stick around a few days an' he'll be showin' up. He told me when I was up there, last month, that he had to come down in September an' pay this guy a ten-thousan'-dollar balance he owed on the location—an' when George promises a thing you kin bank on him makin' good."

"George'll have to pay the ten thousan' to the man's widder, now," Moosehide Charlie opined. "Her an' their little kid is livin' in a tent down a ways from the saw-mill."

"That's kinda funny, too," Camillo Bill said. "I was down to the wharf when the *Hannah* pulled out a few minutes ago, an' I seen her an' the kid go aboard."

"Mebbe the bank give her the ten thousan' on George's say-so. He prob'ly give the guy a note, er somethin'."

Black John shook his head. "No, George didn't give him the scratch of a pen. He paid him fifteen thousan' down, an' promised to pay the rest in September. He checked up on George amongst some old-timers, an' took his word. Fact is, I advanced the woman the ten thousan' this mornin', an' she give me an assignment of the debt. She was anxious to hit back to the States before the freeze-up, so I give her the money, an' she caught the boat."

"Kinda takin' a chanct, wasn't you?" Moosehide asked.

"Cripes, no! If George Ingram give his word, I'd take it, if it was a hundred thousan'."

"Not on George's word—on the woman's," Moosehide explained. "If she didn't have no note, or no promise wrote out an' signed, how'd you know George owed the ten thousan'?"

BLACK JOHN grinned. "Why, hell, Moosehide—don't you know that a woman as good-lookin' as her couldn't tell a lie no more'n George Washington could!"

"Huh," Moosehide grunted. "I've saw some damn good-lookin' wimmin' before now—an' I've heard 'em lie like hell. Fact is, I married one that could. That's why I'm up here. At that, though she done me a good turn—not only I got shet of her, but I've done a damn sight better here than I'd ever done drivin' a dray, back home."

"Kinda funny about that guy gettin' drownded, at that," Bettles opined. "If he was jest stickin' around Dawson waitin' fer George to come down an' pay him—what was he doin' up Big Spruce, alone? Big Spruce is damn rough water fer anyone—let alone a cheechako."

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"It ain't no cinch he was alone," Moosehide said. "Three, four evenin's before they found this guy's body, I seen him talkin' to Bat Eye Cantrill over by the lumber piles."

"Bat Eye Cantrill!" Bettles exclaimed. "I didn't think he'd dare show up around here, what with Downey wantin' to question him about that Seth Brownley robbery over on Anvil Crick."

"That's right," Swiftwater Bill agreed. "But Bat Eye's cagey, all right. He don't show up around here, but at that, he slips in an' out of the Klondike Palace, now an' then. I figger mebbe Cuter Malone sort of tips him off to some dirty job he kin pull. Both Downey an' Peters are off up the McQuesten, an' Bat Eye could know that. It might be, too, that he know'd about George Ingram payin' that guy the fifteen thousan', an' got him to go along up Big Spruce on some kind of a proposition, an' then knocked him off, figgerin' he might have the fifteen thousan' on him."

Bettles shook his head. "I'd kinda doubt that. In the first place, how could he know about George payin' the guy the fifteen thousan'? An' even if he did, it was quite a while back, an' he wouldn't figger he'd be carryin' that much around in his pocket."

"Bat Eye could know all about George payin' over that money," Swiftwater Bill said, "an' he could know that he aimed to come down here this month an' pay him the balance, too. Because he worked fer George up there on the claim, ever sence George bought it—before that, even. He was workin' fer him on another location clost by, when George bought this one."

"Mebbe," Moosehide opined, "he thought George had already paid the ten thousan', an' he might git it."

"Who is this here Bat Eye Cantrill?" asked Black John, who had been an interested listener. "I don't seem to place him."

"Bat Eye, he's a bad actor," Camillo Bill replied. "He showed up this spring. He's suspected of pullin' off several robberies along the cricks. Downey jest about got the goods on him fer that Seth Brownley job."

"What fer lookin' is he?" Black John inquired. "Just in case he might take a notion to show up on Halfaday."

Bettles chuckled. "Oh, he'll be showin' up there when Downey begins crowdin' him. He's a tall, dark-complected guy that's always sort of battin' his eyes when he talks. An' you don't need to worry—he'll be showin' up, all right. A guy like him couldn't no more stay off'n Halfaday than a flea could stay off'n a dog."

"Thanks fer the compliment," Black John grinned. "Just for that, I'll buy another drink."

When the laughter had subsided, Camillo Bill scowled. "If Downey could corner Lafe Toms an' git him to talk, he could forgit the Seth Brownley case an' go after Bat Eye right. But Lafe won't talk. First place, he's afraid of what Bat Eye would do to him, if the case misfired an' some damn jury would turn him loose. An' agin, he's afraid that Bat Eye would lie the whole thing off on him, an' he'd git hung.

"It's like this—Lafe was workin' fer a guy name of Jake Tozzer, down on Birch Crick. He worked all winter fer him on a feeder, an' along this spring, Bat Eye shows up an' locates on another feeder up a little ways from Tozzer. Lafe says after they cleaned up the dump this spring Tozzer must of had damn clost to four thousan' ounces in his cache. Bat Eye, he wasn't doin' so good on his location. He goes down to Fortymile an' comes back with five, six quarts of licker, an' he stops into Tozzer's an' the three of 'em starts in on it.

"Accordin' to Lafe, they all got pretty full, an' the more Tozzer an' Bat Eye drunk, the meaner they got. Lafe got kinda scairt, an' he told Tozzer he was goin' to quit, an' asks fer his pay, which he had sixty-three ounces comin'. Tozzer, he cussed him out, an' wound up by goin' out to his cache an' gittin' the dust. He says, Bat Eye slipped out of the cabin right after Tozzer did, an' come back in before Tozzer got back—so he figgers Bat Eye could of located the cache. Lafe had a couple more drinks an' then throws his stuff in his pack an' hit out fer Fortymile. But it's damn near dark, an' he was pretty drunk by that time, so about a quarter of a mile down the crick he rolls up in his blankets an' hits the hay.

"There's a little crick comes in clost to where he camped in a spruce thicket fer the night, an' a big beaver dam on it that backs the water up in a deep pond. Along about daylight, next mornin', Lafe hears a noise,

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an' he peeks out an' sees Bat Eye had landed this canoe at the foot of the beaver dam on this side crick. He sees Bat Eye lift his pack out of the canoe, an' he says it's all he kin do to lift it—it was that heavy. Then he lifts out a long bundle rolled up in a blanket. He drags the canoe up over the dam. Then he carried the long bundle up to the top of the dam an' lays it down, an' hunts up a heavy rock, an' ties it to the bundle, an' loads it in the canoe an' paddles out to the middle of the pond, an' throws it overboard. Then he comes back, drags the canoe back into the river, loads his pack in it, an' hits downstream.

"Lafe waits a while, an' then goes back to Tozzer's cabin. There ain't no one there, an' Tozzer's cache is empty. Out by the woodpile he finds a chunk of stovewood with some blood an' hairs stickin' to it. So he gits to hell outa there, pronto."

"Howcome you know this?" Black John asked.

"Lafe told me. He was hangin' around Fortymile, this summer, snipin' the bars, an' pannin' out jest about wages. I'd know'd him fer a long time, an' I camped alongside of him one night, an' seen there was somethin' on his mind, so I asked him what the trouble was, an' he told me. I advised him to go right to Downey with it, but he damn near throw'd a fit. 'Not by a damn sight!' he hollers. 'Bat Eye, he's smart, an' he'd lie out of it, shore as hell. He'd lie it onto me, claimin' I was the one that done it, what with workin' fer Tozzer all winter, I'd know where his cache was at, an' all. Or even if they arrested Bat Eye, they wouldn't have no hell of a good case an' if the jury turned him loose he'd hunt me up an' knock me off shore.'

"I seen how he was prob'ly right, so I never said nothin' to Downey, 'cause I'd shore hate to see Lafe hung fer somethin' that damn Bat Eye pulled off. Lafe ain't none too smart, an' some lawyer could git him all balled up, while Bat Eye could prob'ly lie out of it, an' have an iron-clad alibi worked out to boot. An' besides that old Jake wasn't no hell of a loss no way you'd look at him. Be'n in the country ever sence the Yukon wasn't nothin' but a crick. Ornery old cuss, what with peddlin' hooch to the Siwashes an' the like of that."

"Yeah," Bettles agreed, "an' there's plenty of us old-timers figgers it wasn't no one else but Jake that knocked off Tom Cole years ago on the Porcupine."

"Where's this Lafe at, now?" Black John asked.

"Oh, he's prob'ly still down around Fortymile. He hangs out down there most of the time."

LATE in the afternoon Cush joined the party, more drinks were had, and shortly Bettles pointed toward a man who had just entered the room. "Speak of the devil, an' up he pops—there's George Ingram, now! Come on over here, George, an' belly up!"

As the man joined them, Black John grinned.

"Yeah, belly up, George, an' shuck out that ten thousan' you owe me."

Ingram returned the smile. "Yeah—who says I owe you ten thousan'—an' what for?"

"This paper says so," the big man replied, laying the assignment signed by the woman on the bar. "The lady said you owed it to her husband, but bein' as he's dead, you owed it to her, an' as she was anxious to pull out on the *Hannah,* I shoved the ten thousan'."

Ingram glanced at the paper, and nodded. "Okay. I heard about 'em findin' his body on Big Spruce. Too bad. He was a good fella. Here's your ten thousan'," he added, counting the money onto the bar. "You took me for half what I draw'd out of the bank, figgerin' on settin' in a game, tonight."

"Oh, we'll set in a game, all right," Black John smiled, an' I'll try to get the other ten thousan', on top of it."

"Even then you'd still be took," Cush said. "You better fork over them ten ounces."

"I ain't payin' that bet, yet," Black John said. "You wait till I'm through with this deal."

Bettles laughed. "Has someone be'n takin' Black John?" he asked.

"Oh, shore—any good-lookin' woman kin take him," Cush replied. "He jest got ten thousan' of it back off'n George—but she's still into him fer fifteen thousan'."

"How's that?" Swiftwater Bill asked.

"The transaction was a rather compli-

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cated one, which would take too long to explain," Black John replied.

"Complicated—hell!" Cush scoffed. "He give her twenty-five thousan', cash money, fer ten sacks of the damndest lookin' stuff you ever seen—fool's gold—that's what it was. I jest come from the *hotel*, an' you'd ort to hear the clerk cussin' on account he had to carry the damn stuff outa her room an' throw it out back. I bet John ten ounces she'd take him, when I first seen him eyein' her there in the dinin' room—an' she done it—an' now the damn cuss won't pay his bet."

Bettles laughed. "How about it, John?"

"As I said, the transaction is so complicated that it is not yet concluded. When it's over with, the bet will be paid—Cush don't need to worry about that." He turned to Ingram. "By the way, George, did you have a fella workin' for you this summer, name of Bat Eye Cantrill?"

"Yeah, I hired him late in the spring. He jest quit a couple of weeks ago."

"Good man, was he?"

"No, I wouldn't call him a good man. Men were scarce up the river, or I'd never have hired him. He's no one I'd trust very far."

"Did he know about that deal you made with the cheechako you bought the location from—that woman's husband?"

"Oh, shore. He knew about it. In fact, he was right there when I bought it. Why?"

"Oh, nothin'. I was just wonderin'. Come on, let's get supper over with, an' get that game goin'. I'm hungry."

IV

THE stud game lasted till far into the night and as the two headed for the hotel Black John turned to Cush. "You about ready to hit out fer Halfway?" he asked.

"Hell, no! It'll be four, five days yet, what with pickin' out all the stuff I need, an' then dickerin' to git it freighted up to the fort."

"Okay. Then I'll just slip out in the mornin' an' look over a proposition I heard about down Fortymile way. I'd ort to be back about the time you're ready to hit out fer Halfaday."

Cush slanted him a glance. "Is she good-lookin'?" he asked.

"Is who good-lookin'? What the hell you talkin' about?"

"This here proposition you heard about down to Fortymile. If she is, an' you'd pay up yer other bet, I'll go you ten more ounces you'll git took agin."

"Why, you damn fool! There's no woman mixed up in this. It's a proposition that might pay off pretty good."

"Huh, you know jest as well as I do there ain't nothin' doin' down around Fortymile, no more. All the good locations has be'n took up—like Sam Amery on Fortymile, an' old Jake Tozzer on Birch Crick. Fer's new propositions goes, Fortymile's dead."

"Jake Tozzer's dead, too, accordin' to the talk. Got murdered along in the spring."

"That's one good thing about the Fortymile country anyhow. Jake was as ornery as they make 'em."

"Howcome you knew Jake?"

"I never know'd him. Never even seen him. But that klooch of mine, she's told me about how old Jake used to sell hooch to the Siwashes. She claimed it was Jake's rotten hooch that killed her pa."

Black John nodded. "Yeah, accordin' to the talk, Jake ain't mourned none. The more of his kind that get knocked off, the better it is for the country. But in spite of you claimin' Fortymile's dead, I'm goin' down there an' look this proposition over. There might be somethin' in it."

"There better be fifteen thousan', an' ten ounces to boot in it, if you aim to break even on this trip," Cush replied, as they reached the hotel. "But don't be gone more'n four, five days. I shore don't want to hang around here waitin' on you."

INQUIRY at Bergman's saloon in Fortymile revealed that Lafe Toms was sniping the bars on a creek some ten miles up the river, where Black John found him the following day frying bacon over a little fire in front of his tent. "Your name Lafe Toms?" he asked, as the man looked up from forking over the bacon in the pan.

"Yeah. That's me."

"My name's John Smith—Black John, they call me, on account of my whiskers bein' that color."

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"Black John Smith!" the man exclaimed. "So you're him, eh? The king of them outlaws that hangs out on Halfaday Crick! Glad to know you. I've heer'd about you. Bettles, an' Camillo Bill, an' Moosehide Charlie, an' Burr MacShane—all the sourdoughs claims to know you."

"Oh, shore. Fine bunch of men, them sourdoughs—providin' you don't set in a stud game with 'em. Fact is, it's on the word of Camillo Bill I come down here to hunt you up. You worked for Jake Tozzer all winter, an' on into the spring, didn't you?"

The man hesitated for a moment. "Yeah," he said, finally. "I was workin' fer Jake."

"Well, the talk is around Dawson amongst some of Jake's friends, that Jake got knocked off this spring, an' that you're the one that done it. Corporal Downey an' Constable Peters is off on a patrol way up the McQuesten, but when they come back these friends of Jake's are goin' to demand an investigation."

The man seemed to turn a shade paler. "It's a damn lie! I never done it!" he cried. "But if the police gits to nosin' around there, they might claim it was me—an' how the hell could I prove it worn't? It was Bat Eye Cantrill knocked him off! That's who done it!"

"Did you see him do it?"

"No, but I seen him sink Jake in a beaver dam, next mornin', an' make off with all the dust in Jake's cache—right around four thousan' ounces, it was! Bat Eye, he was workin' a claim above Jake's, an' he wasn't doin' no good. He went down to Fortymile, along in the spring, an' when he come back he fetched a lot of licker, an' he stopped into Jake's an' we started drinkin'. Jake an' Bat Eye got to quarrelin', an' the more they drunk, the ornerier they got. I got scairt an quit, an' Jake paid me off, an' I hit out fer Fortymile, but it was comin' on night, an' I was pretty well oiled, so I camped a little ways down the crick, an' in the mornin' I seen Bat Eye run his canoe ashore at the foot of a beaver dam that backs up the water of a little crick that runs in there—an' I seen him lift Jake's dust out, an' then carry Jake up to the top of the dam an' wire a rock to him, an' paddle out an' sink him. Then he drug his canoe back into Birch Crick an' loaded Jake's dust in it, an' hit off down the crick."

"You saw Jake, an' saw the dust, I s'pose?"

"Well, I seen him h'ist his pack outa the canoe, so damn heavy he couldn't hardly lift it. An' I seen him sink this here long bundle wropped up in some blankets. I went back to Jake's cabin after Bat Eye ha went down the crick, an' Jake worn't there an' his cache was empty, an' I found a chunk of stovewood with blood an' hair—gray hair, like Jake's—stickin' to it. What I claim—if it worn't Jake an' his dust in that bundle an' that pack, what the hell was it? An' where the hell was they?"

"Your deduction seems logical."

"My which seems what?"

"I was goin' on to say that Camillo Bill slipped me the word that you told him the same story you just told me. He believes you've told the truth, an' so do I. But as you p'inted out, the police might not believe it. Especially, if Bat Eye would hear about the investigation, an' hunt Downey up, an' tell the story the other way around—that it was him laid in the brush an' watched you sink Jake in the beaver dam an' make off with the dust. I don't know this Bat Eye personally, but they tell me he's a pretty slick article."

"Yeah, he's smart, all right, Bat Eye is. Cripes—if he'd tell it like that to the police, I might even git hung!"

Black John nodded. "Yeah, that's what I figured. That's why I come down here to find you. I've got the reputation of bein' an outlaw. But I've also got the reputation of sometimes helpin' someone out who's in trouble."

"That's right!" the man exclaimed eagerly. "That's what the sourdoughs all claim. Well, I'm in trouble, all right! An', by God, if Downey comes back, an' Bat Eye gits to him an' lies that murder off on me, I'll git hung—an' then it'll be too late to help me!"

"Your postulate seems tenable," Black John smiled.

"My which seems what, again? Yer allus sayin' that somethin' I don't even know I've got seems like somethin' I never heer'd tell of."

"Puttin' it another way, what I mean is, that you better hit for Halfaday Crick an' lay low there till this thing sort of blows

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over. You'll be safe there. The police hardly ever shows up on Halfaday, an' if one should, all you'll have to do is slip over acrost the line into Alaska, an' wait till he goes back."

"But where's this here Halfaday Crick at? How'll I git there?"

"You can handle a canoe, can't you?"

"Oh, shore. I'm good in a canoe."

"You're all set, then. It happens that Cush is in Dawson. He runs the tradin' post an' saloon on Halfaday. He'll be ready to go back about the time we hit Dawson. He ain't worth a damn in a canoe alone. We came down together, but I've got a little business to 'tend to before goin' back, so if you'll go back with Cush an' handle the canoe, it'll be a break for both of you."

"I'll say it will!" the man agreed heartily. "An' you come clean down here from Dawson jest to help me out of this here trouble—when you didn't even know me?"

"Oh, shore. Accordin' to Camillo Bill, you're a good sort of guy—an' I'd hate like hell to see an innocent man hung. What I claim—it never hurts to do a man a good turn. There may come a time when I'll need one myself."

"Well, if I git outa this here jam, an' you ever need a good turn, jest you holler, an' I'll come runnin'—even if it's clean down to Afriky!"

"Okay. We'll get busy now, an' throw your stuff together, an' hit out for Dawson. I wonder where this Bat Eye Cantrill hangs out? I'd sort of like to see what he looks like—just in case he'd ever take a notion to show up on Halfaday. We shore don't want no murderers like him living on the crick."

"I don't know where he's at. I ain't saw him sence that mornin' he shoved off down Birch Crick. But that night whilst we was drinkin' together in Jake's cabin, seems like he claimed he had him a klooch he hid out with down to Moosehide. He kinda bragged that he'd pulled off some dust-stealin' jobs, an' then he'd go down an' hide out with this here klooch till things blow'd over. Claimed it was clost enough to Dawson so's he could sneak up there nights an' git the dope on how things was goin' from Cuter Malone."

V

ARRIVING in Dawson late the following evening, Black John swerved the canoe ashore at the abandoned sawmill. "You better camp here while I hunt Cush up an' find out when he's ready to hit for Halfaday. It's jest as well if no one sees you around here, 'specially with me or Cush. If there's a stink raised about Tozzer gettin' knocked off, an' someone told Downey he saw you with one of us, he'd hit right out for Halfaday. If everyone thinks you're somewheres on the Fortymile, Downey might fool around down there huntin' you till hell knows when."

Seated in the lobby of the hotel, Cush glanced up from his newspaper as Black John stepped into the room.

He eyed the big man over the top of his square-framed spectacles. "It's about time you was showin' up," he said. "I be'n over to the Tivoli three, four times sence supper, figgerin' you might go there instid of here when you got back. How much did she take you fer?"

Black John grinned. "Not much this time. I got off lucky. Fact is, Cush, I've got to stick around here for a day or so yet—"

"By Cripes!" Cush interrupted. "I ain't a-goin' to hang around here no longer! I finished up my business this mornin', an' if you'd of be'n here we'd of pulled out then. What with One Armed John runnin' things up there, I'll be damn lucky to have the fort left when I git back."

The big man's grin widened. "Oh, I don't know, Cush. Far's I can see, One Arm's as honest as men of his caliber are apt to be. His peculations would hardly amount to more than petty pilfering."

"I don't know a nothin' about his speculations—but give a man time an' he could petty pilfer the hull damn outfit! I'm hittin' out, come daylight, if I've got to hire me a paddler."

"I surmised that if your business was concluded, you'd be in a sweat to get goin', so I made an arrangement that will work out perfectly. This party that I went down to Fortymile to see, will be glad to accompany you to Halfaday and handle the canoe."

"Not by a damn sight! I ain't hittin' out

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with no woman no matter how good lookin' she is! I've be'n took three times a'ready—an' that's enough! The only one I ever married that was worth a damn, up an' died on me. An' when she done that, I says I'm through with wimmin from now on—an' I am! An' besides that, we don't want no wimmin of no kind on Halfaday. There ain't no one kin raise hell with a crick like a woman. You know that as well as I do—an' here yer tryin' to make me fetch one in!"

BLACK JOHN'S grin became an audible chuckle. "It has be'n my experience that a conclusion that was jumped at is rarely as tenable as one arrived at by logical deduction."

"Yeah, an' it's be'n my experience that all the big words you kin think up ain't a-goin' to make me hit out fer Halfaday with no woman—black, white, yaller, or red!"

"The party I referred to don't happen to be a woman. He's a man. Camillo Bill told me about him. Lafe Toms, his name is, an' he's a good guy—not too wide between the ears—but hard-workin' an' honest. He's in a jam on account of bein' suspected of knockin' off Jake Tozzer this spring—"

"Huh—if he done that I'd like him, even if he wasn't honest," Cush opined.

"That's ondoubtless the proper attitude, but as a matter of fact, he didn't murder Tozzer, but he's damn liable to swing for it on circumstantial evidence, bolstered up by the testimony of the damn cuss that pulled off the job. Downey's away an' it might be quite a while before he gets back. My idea is to slip Lafe up to Halfaday an' let him hole up in One Eyed John's cabin, while I sort of look around a little. After listenin' to Camillo's story, I sort of figured that if I could locate Tozzer's murderer, I'd save Downey quite a lot of trouble, save an innocent man from the gallows, do society in general a good turn—an' just possible net some slight profit on the transaction."

Cush grunted. "Huh—this here slight profit you aim to make couldn't be the main reason, an' them other items a kind of a side-line, could it?"

"Again, I must p'int out that you're jumpin' to a conclusion."

"Yeah—well I'm a-goin' to jump to bed, too. I want to git goin' by daylight. Where's this here Lafe Toms at?"

"He's camped down to the sawmill. My canoe's there. Slip down there in the mornin', an' you'll find Lafe waitin'. I'll remain here for the present. But I'll reach Halfaday anon, as the poet would say. An' in the meantime, methinks I'll hie me to the Tivoli an' woo the gentle goddess of fortune."

"Huh, them goddesses down to Cuter Malone's Klondike Palace woos a damn sight easier'n what the cards does—'specially with them sourdoughs settin' behind 'em. If I wasn't too sleepy to set up an' keep cases on you, I'd bet you ten ounces, daylight'll find you slippin' out of the Klondike Palace—an' not the Tivoli."

Black John frowned. "Why, my good man, do you mean to impugn my veracity?"

"I might if I knowed how," Cush retorted. "What I'm gittin' at is—you don't git down here so damn often—an' you kin play a hell of a lot of stud on Halfaday. Good night. I'm a-goin' to bed."

VI

BLACK John played stud all night, and in the morning he slipped down to Moosehide, the Siwash village located on the river bank some four miles below Dawson, proceeding directly to the shack of Owl Man, an Indian he had once saved from drowning. When the door opened in answer to his knock, he stepped into the room and seated himself on a rude bench. "Long time no see," he said. "How they comin'?"

"I'm git 'long a'ri'. Ketch de feesh. Summer 'bout forty dog. Som'tam work 'roun—chop de wood—help wit the sluicin. How you be?"

"Oh, I manage to scrape along, somehow. Work my claim—a little of this—a little of that."

The Indian smiled. "Me, I'm t'ink dat more 'leetle dis, leetle dat' dan work de claim—eh?"

The big man scowled. "What the hell do you mean by that?

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The other shrugged. "Me—I'm wish I'm smart, lak you—I ain' got to work, nieder. W'at you want me do, now?"

"Just want to ask you a question—that's all. Do you know a man named Bat Eye Cantrill?"

The man hesitated, his glance fleeting swiftly from door to window. He shook his head. "No, me—I'm ain' know no one lak dat."

"You're a damn liar! Come across, now, an' tell me the truth, or I'll just drag you down to the river an' throw you in where I pulled you out, that time. You know Bat Eye—an' you know where he's at, right now. So do I. He's hidin' out with some klooch, right here in the village. You know what klooch. I don't. But you're goin' to tell me."

Again the man's eyes rolled furtively. "Dat Bat Eye—she dam' bad mans. She keel me sure lak hell, if I'm tell you w'ere she stay."

"No, he won't. Listen—did I ever lie to you?"

"No."

"Ain't you done a lot of things for me you didn't want to—an' didn't you always come out all right—an' get well paid, to boot?"

The Indian nodded.

"Okay then. You'll come out all right this time, too. An' I'll pay you five ounces. This Bat Eye might be tough—but you know damn well I'm tougher. You'd a damn sight better have Bat Eye on your tail than me.

"Here's what I want you to do. You go an' tell Bat Eye there's a guy in your shack from Cuter Malone's that wants to see him. Tell him it's important, an' to come right over here."

"Bat Eye, she no b'lieve dat. Cuter, she know w'ere Bat Eye hang out. He sen' de man to Minnie Claw house."

"Guess that's right," Black John agreed. "Well, you show me where this Minnie Claw lives, an' I'll give you the five ounces." The two stepped outside, and Owl Man pointed to a shack a short distance away. Smoke curled from the stovepipe. "Bat Eye, she dere, a'ri'. I'm see heem go een de house las' night."

Proceeding to the shack, Black John tapped on the door. Receiving no answer, he rapped louder, and presently the door opened a few inches and a young Indian woman peered out at him from between narrowed lids. "W'at you want?" she snapped.

"Tell Bat Eye there's a guy here from Cuter Malone's that wants to see him."

"Ain' no Bat Eye here. Me—I'm ain' know no Bat Eye."

"Don't lie to me! You're Minnie Claw, ain't you? Cuter knows where Bat Eye hangs out. He told me I'd find him here. I've got to see him."

The door slammed shut, and a few moments later was thrown open and Black John found himself face to face with a tall, dark man, whose amber-colored eyes peered sharply at him from between lids that opened and closed with a nervous twitch. "Who are you," the man growled, "an' what do you want?"

"Cuter tipped me off to where you was," the big man answered, noting that the other's right hand held a revolver half-concealed by his thigh. "You can put up the artillery. Smith, the name is—John Smith, better known in these parts as Black John."

The amber eyes suddenly widened and blinked rapidly. "You Black John Smith that runs that gang of outlaws up on Half-aday Crick? Well, come on inside. Glad to know you!"

Rummaging in a cupboard, the man produced a bottle, and two glasses which he placed on the table, seated himself, and indicated an empty chair. "Draw up, an' set, an' have a drink. What's on yer mind?"

BACK JOHN seated himself, filled his glass from the bottle and glanced toward the klooch who stood near the stove eyeing the two sullenly. "She savvies English," he said. "Maybe we better go outside."

"To hell with goin' outside. Let her go." He turned to the woman. "Git out," he ordered. "Go on over to yer sister's an' stay there till I tell you to come back. I an' this guy's gonna make medicine."

Without a word the woman sidled from the room, and Bat Eye picked up his glass. "Here's lookin' at you," he said, as both

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downed the liquor. "Fill 'em up again," he invited. It's your turn to talk."

"It's like this," Black John began, when the glasses were refilled. "A while back a guy shows up on Halfaday claimin' his name is Lafe Toms. He's a smallish sort of a guy without no more in under his hat than what it takes to get along. He locates on a feeder, an' shows up now an' then at Cush's —Cush he runs a saloon an' tradin' post on the crick—an' one evenin' him an' I an' Cush got to h'istin a few, an' Cush, he happens to say how he heard down to Dawson that some old fella down on Birch Crick, name of Jake Tozzer had disappeared along in the spring, an' some of his friends was aimin' to get the police to investigate.

"Well, Lafe, he sorts of gags on his licker, an' looks kind of scairt like, an' then he says that's why he hit for Halfaday. He heard the same talk down around Dawson, an' bein' as he was known to have be'n working for Tozzer, he was afraid the police would lay it onto him, if they figured Tozzer had got knocked off. He claimed he never done it, but said he knows who did. Then he up an' tells us that one day this spring you came along with some hooch, an' the three of you got to hittin' her up, an' you an' Tozzer got ugly, an' he quit an' hit out for Fortymile. But bein' as it was late, an' he was pretty well loaded, he didn't get no more'n a quarter of a mile, an' camped in the brush. In the mornin' he says he saw you come along in a canoe, lift a heavy pack out, which he figures had Tozzer's dust in it, an' then he saw you lift out a long bundle wrapped in a blanket, carry it to the top of a beaver dam on a feeder that run in there, an' wire a rock to it, an' float it out onto the pond in the canoe, an' sink it. Then you dragged the canoe back into Birch Crick, an' hit out, takin' the heavy pack along with you. He says he went back to Tozzer's, but he wasn't there, an' his cache had be'n robbed."

As the big man talked, the other listened intently, as his eyes flickered and twitched, and the scowl deepened on his face.

"He's a damn liar!" Bat Eye cried. "He told the story all right—only he told it wrong end to! What come off was like this —I stopped in to Jake's place, all right, an' I fetched along some licker, an' we drunk a lot of it, jest like Lafe claimed. Only it was him an' Jake got to augerin' about how much Lafe had comin'. Lafe, he wanted to quit, an' Jake wouldn't pay him. I seen there might be trouble, so I hit out fer my claim a little ways above Jake's. In the mornin' I got to wonderin' if everything was all right down there, so I slips down the crick. There ain't no one to Jake's, an' I hunted around an' found a place in the rocks where it looked like Jake's cache had be'n—but the hole was empty, an' then I found a chunk of firewood which it had blood an' gray hairs stickin' to it where Lafe had throw'd it after brainin' Jake. Well, it worn't none of my funeral, so I went back to my claim."

"Didn't go down to Fortymile an' report it, eh?"

"Not by a damn sight, I didn't! I didn't want the damn police snoopin' around there, 'cause there was quite a few in Bergman's saloon when I bought them six quarts, an' hit out fer Birch Crick. How'd I know the police wouldn't figger mebbe me an' Jake got to drinkin' an' I knocked him off? They might figger I knocked Lafe off, too—an' him not around there. The fewer police there is snoopin' around a place, the better I like it."

Black John nodded. "Yeah, we don't encourage police snoopin' on Halfaday, neither." He paused, downed his drink, and smiled. "Well, if that's the way of it, it looks like I've had my trip for nothin'."

"What do you mean—fer nothin'? Cripes, you tipped me off about what that damn Lafe Toms is blabbin' around, didn't you? I shore take it kind of you to come clean down here to tip me off. What I'd ort to do is hit fer Halfaday Crick an' blast that damn Lafe to hell, 'fore he goes ahead an' spills his guts to the police."

"The precaution would have its merits," Black John opined. "But what I meant about makin' this trip for nothin', is that I'm sorry to hear that you ain't the one that knocked Jake off. I must confess that I didn't come down here to tip you off to what Lafe was spreadin' around. Off hand, I wouldn't have deemed it any of my business. The reason I hunted you up is that the way Lafe told it, it looked to me like a

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damn smart piece of work. An' I figured that a guy that could get away with a job of that kind would be a good man to have on Halfaday. You see, I run things up there, an' I'm always on the lookout for talent. We've got some damn good men in our gang, but we're always on the lookout for more." He paused and shoved his chair slightly back from the table. "Well—no harm done, I s'pose. Kind of sorry to hear it was Lafe, himself, pulled that job—because, from what I've seen of him, I don't figure he's smart enough to fill the bill."

BAT EYE cleared his throat roughly. "H-e-e-m, don't be in no hurry. Drink up, an' have another. Fact is, I've heard a lot about you boys up there on Halfaday Crick. An' how the police don't dast to show up there. An' how you pull off some big jobs, an' allus git away with it. An' how you hang anyone that tries to horn in on you." He paused and grinned. "Accordin' to Cuter Malone, you've took him fer plenty, a time er two—an' Cuter ain't no easy mark, at that."

"That's right," Black John admitted. "An' that's just why we've got to have smart guys in the gang."

"Tellin' you about me, I'd shore like to jine up with you, I've figgered on hittin' out fer Halfaday, one of these times, an' try to make a deal with you boys."

Black John shook his head. "It wouldn't hardly be worth yer while. We don't take on no one without he's had considerable experience along—well, along certain lines—if you get what I mean. We don't sign on no novices."

Bat Eye's thin lips twisted into a smile. "Let me tell you, brother—I ain't no novice. Not in no man's language, I ain't. Fact is, that damn Lafe Toms told you the truth—about how it was me knocked Jake Tozzer off an' got away with his dust. Four thousan' an' six ounces is what I got—an' that ain't no chicken feed. But, at that, if Id know'd Lafe was layin' in the bresh an' watchin' me sink Jake in that beaver pond, by God, I'd of knocked him off too—an' fed the both of 'em to the beavers."

Black John frowned. "Of course, you wantin' to join up with us, like you claim you do—it's easy to set there an' change yer tune."

"Hell—I'd be'n a damn fool to admit it, wouldn't I—when there wasn't no reason to?"

"Well, yes. Takin' it by an' large, as the sayin' goes, I s'pose a man wouldn't set around, off hand, an' brag about a murder."

"Yer damn right, he wouldn't—if he had all his buttons!"

"Talk's cheap, Bat Eye. I couldn't hardly set here an' take yer word for it, without I had some proof. What I'm huntin' for is a man that's got guts an' brains—not just a damn liar."

"I've got the proof, all right. I've got better'n three thousan', nine hundred of them ounces of Tozzer's cached, right now. Is that proof enough?"

Black John nodded. "Yes, I'd say that would be proof enough that you pulled off that job—provided you could produce the ounces. But I was just thinkin', even admittin' you pulled that job, maybe you're a one-job man. I don't like one-job men. Anyone might pull one job an' be lucky enough to get away with it—even a damn fool might do that. In my business I need men of experience. An' you can see for yourself that pullin' one job don't give a man no hell of a lot of experience, even if he got away with it."

"Oh, I've pulled other jobs—plenty of 'em. I robbed Seth Brownley on Anvil Crick, an' Jim Kirch on Hunker. An' only a couple of days ago I took a woman right there in Dawson fer fifteen thousan', cash money. Had to knock off her husban' to make the play. He sold a claim up the Klondike to a guy name of George Ingram. I was workin' fer George at the time. I know'd he had to make the final payment in September, so a couple of weeks ago I quit an' come on down to Dawson, where this guy was waitin' fer his money. He's a minin' engineer, so I gets him to go off up Big Spruce Crick to look over a hard-rock proposition, an' I knocks him off, makin' it look like he'd got drownded in a rapids, then I sacks up about a hundred pound of fool's gold, an' hits back to Dawson an' pays gold royalty on the damn stuff to a rookie policeman, an' then I hunts up this guy's widder, an' claimin' I'm George Ingram, which she

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hadn't never saw, I offers to pay her the balance in gold, which she kin cash in for more in the States. I not only pays off the balance George owed her, but I takes her fer the original payment he made, by sellin' her the rest of the fool's gold. How's that fer smart? Oh, I've got the experience, all right. I kin work on men er wimmin, either one."

"Pullin' off an intricate proposition like that shows you've got somethin', all right. But as the Good Book says, I'm from Missouri. I'd sort of like to see the proof of that deal."

"I kin prove it, all right," the man replied, as he removed a money-belt from beneath his shirt and tossed it onto the table. "The fifteen thousan' is in there along with the signed receipt. Count it."

BLACK JOHN counted the money, glanced at the receipt, and nodded slowly. "Okay, Bat Eye, I guess that proves it beyond any doubt. You're just the man I'm lookin' for. Yes, sir—just the kind of a guy I like to have show up on Halfaday. I sometimes have a hard time gettin' holt of the right man. A lot of 'em drifts in on us—but they drift on again."

"You don't need to worry about me. I know what side my bread's buttered on. By God, onct I git up there, I'll stay!"

The big man regarded him thoughtfully. "That's right, Bat Eye, I believe you will. Yes, sir, from what I've seen an' heard, I'd be willin' to bet that you'll be on Halfaday a long, long time. A lot of the boys has be'n there quite a while, already."

"I'll bet I'll stay there as long as any of 'em," the man boasted.

Black John nodded. "Somehow, I believe you're right. But there's one thing I forgot to tell you. You know, we've got a good gang—up there on Halfaday. Well, while I'm generally credited with runnin' this gang, the fact is we all sort of run things together. The rest of the boys have got just as much say as I have when it comes to takin' on new talent. An' they're just as hard-headed as I am when it comes to a man provin' what he's done—some of 'em's harder-headed, even. So when you get there, don't forget to fetch along all the proof you've got—all the cash an' all the dust saved off'n

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them jobs you've pulled. I'd hate like hell to have the boys turn you down because they ain't satisfied—after all the trouble I've had locatin' you. If the boys okay you, you can stick all your dust in Cush's safe an' take a receipt for it. An' you can bet that once it gets in that safe it'll stay there."

"That's swell," the man agreed. "That's right where I'd want it to stay. 'Cause, like I said, I figure on bein' up there from now on, I'd want the stuff handy—an' it looks like the safe would beat a cache all to hell. I guess no one'll ever rob *that* safe, eh?"

"It ain't likely," Black John replied. "When can you start for Halfaday?"

"When you goin' back there?"

"Right now."

"Okay, I'll go along with you. The quicker we git up there, the quicker we kin git somethin' goin'."

"That's right, Bat Eye. In fact, I'm thinkin' of a play that I believe'll interest you from start to finish."

"An' you bet, the first damn thing I do when I git there will be to knock off that damn Lafe Toms before he blabs what he knows where the police kin git holt of it. Or better yet—I've heard how you boys hang damn cusses like him up there—how about it? How about hangin' him?"

Black John nodded. "Well—as a matter of fact, Bat Eye, it was a hangin' I had in mind, when I spoke. But come on—let's get goin'. Where's this cache you've got Tozzer's dust in?"

The man grinned, shoved the wood box aside, lifted several floorboards, and one at a time, removed forty-nine eighty-ounce sacks of dust which he placed in his packsack. He glanced up with a grin. "The klooch made them sacks. Sewed 'em damn good an' stout. But she don't even know they're cached here—right in her own shack. I told her I cached the dust over there in the bresh on the sidehill. When she comes back an' I ain't here she'll think I'm off on some kind of a job. But when I don't show up after a while, I'll bet she'll dig that hull hill down an' throw it in the river huntin' fer the dust."

THE trip to Halfaday was made without incident, and the two went immediately

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to Black John's shack. "Jest stick the pack-sack under the bunk, yonder," the big man advised. "We'll slip over to the saloon an' see Cush. There might be some characters hangin' around there that it would be just as well if they didn't spot a pack that heavy. None of the regular gang would make a play for it—but quite a lot of riff-raff drifts in on us, an' the way I figure, what they don't know won't hurt 'em. We can show the boys the proof, later."

The two proceeded to the saloon to find a dozen or more of the men of Halfaday, some at the bar, others at the stud tables. As they stepped into the room Bat Eye halted suddenly, glanced at Black John, and pointed to Lafe Toms who stood leaning against the bar. "There's the damn cuss, now! Why not go ahead an' hang him an' be done with it?"

The big man glanced about the room, as the eyes of all centered on the speaker. "Well, there seems to be a quorum present. All of 'em members in good standin'. Not a riff-raff amongst 'em. Guess we might's well git it over with, first as last." Striding to the bar he pounded loudly with his fist. "Miners' meetin' called to try one, Lafe Toms, fer murder, robbery, an' shootin' off his mouth. Five minutes will be allowed for cashin' in chips an' finishin' drinks."

Lafe Toms turned pale and his mouth sagged open, as all eyes centered on him. Drinks were downed, and chips cashed in.

Lafe eyed Black John. "What—what the hell do you mean—murder an' robbery? I never murdered no one—nor robbed 'em neither one!"

"Shut up!" the big man roared, scowling at the other. "I'll app'int Red John as custodian of the prisoner. Fetch him along, John—stand him right there." When the thoroughly terrified man was properly placed, Black John glanced into the faces of the men who had crowded about. "Boys," he began, "I have with me here, one Bat Eye Cantrill. Bat Eye claims to have heard of the gang of outlaws that hangs out here, an' he wants to become one of us. He claims to have a record behind him that includes murder, robbery, an' woman-swindlin'. I've listened to a recital of his activities, and am inclined to believe that he told the truth.

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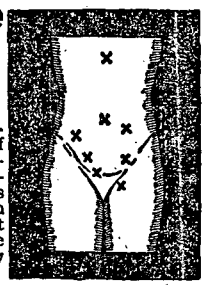

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'Specially so, because one incident checks in with what I heard, not so long ago from the lips of the prisoner, Lafe Toms. I refer to the murder an' robbery, this spring, of Jake Tozzer, down on Birch Creek. Lafe claims he laid in the brush an' saw Bat Eye, here, sink Tozzer's body in a beaver dam, an' make off with his dust—facts which Bat Eye admits.

"Now bein' as it's customary for a new candidate that seeks to throw in with our gang, to prove himself worthy of our acceptance, I'll introduce, to-wit, Bat Eye Cantrill, who will under oath, name over the jobs he pulled off here in the Yukon. Jobs that includes the robbery of Seth Brownley on Anvil Crick, an' Jim Kirch, on Hunker. Likewise, as I said, he admits the Jake Tozzer job, an' also the murder of a minin' engineer on Big Spruce, an' the swindlin' of his widow, in Dawson. Gentlemen, I hereby introduce Bat Eye Cantrill, in person, who will describe these various jobs, in detail." He turned to the man. "Hold up your right or left hand. Do you swear to tell the truth, the hull truth, er any part of it, s'e'l'pe God?"

"Shore I do."

"Okay. Gentlemen—Mr. Bat Eye Cantrill!"

FOR an hour the men of Halfaday stood and to their astonishment listened to a boasting recital of murder, robbery, and the swindling of a widow. When he finally finished, the voice of Black John boomed on the silence. "You've all heard what Bat Eye had to say—an' believe me, it was an earful! His complaint against the prisoner at the bar, to wit, Lafe Toms, is that the said Lafe did, in confidence, relate the Tozzer incident to me. His claim is that such act constitutes a hangable offense. Now I'll admit that under certain circumstances, tryin' to hang a murder an' robbery on a man would be hangable. But you have just heard from Bat Eye himself an admission, under oath, that he did, in fact, commit the said murder an' robbery, describin' the job in detail. It is evident, then, that Lafe's offense consisted merely in tellin' the truth—which is not a hangable offense on Halfaday."

"What the hell!" Bat Eye blurted, his eyes

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twitching as he glanced into the stony-eyed faces about him.

Black John turned to him. "Hold on, Bat Eye. I believe you expressed a desire to remain permanently on Halfaday, didn't you."

"Shore I did—but . . ."

"Then one of the first things you've got to learn is not to interrupt a miners' meetin'." He turned to the others. "We'll take the vote, now. All in favor of hangin' Lafe Toms for tellin' the truth, signify by sayin' 'Aye'." Silence greeted the words. "Contrary 'No.'" A thunder of "no's" followed, as Black John again pounded the bar with his fist. "Miners' meetin' reconvened to try one, to wit, alias Bat Eye Cantrill for numerous crimes committed on contiguous cricks, an' subtendin' territory—some of 'em more subtendin' an' contiguous than others, but all well within our jurisdiction. You heard the man's confession of these various revolting crimes under oath from his own lips. Therefore, the prosecution rests its case. I will observe, however, that you also heard from the prisoner's own lips his expressed determination to remain permanently here on the crick. I believe his wish, in this respect, should be granted. However, it's up to you men to say, whether such permanent sojourn shall be in the flesh, or only in the sperit. In other words do we want any such a self-confessed, cache-robbin', widow-swindlin', murderer livin' here amongst us—or do we not? Any one of the offenses he confessed to is hangable under our code. I will now put it to a vote. All in favor of hangin' the prisoner, to wit, alias Bat Eye Cantrill signify by sayin' 'Aye.'" A deafening chorus of "Ayes" filled the room, and Pot-Gutted John, the official hangman of Halfaday stepped forward with a rope ready noosed.

After the body had been cut down, Black John ordered it carried into the storeroom. "We'll bury him in the mornin'," he said. "He expressed a wish to remain on Halfaday as long as anyone else does—an' from here, it looks like he will."

Later, when the others had departed, leaving him alone with Cush, Black John stepped into the storeroom and returning with a money-belt which he opened, and counted fifteen thousand dollars in bills onto the bar. "This is the money he got off the

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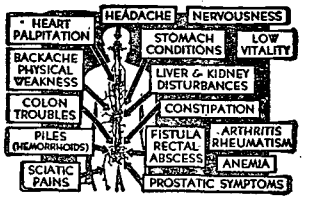

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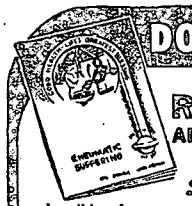

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widow," he said. "Just shove it in the safe an' credit my account."

Cush frowned. "So—you got yer money back, after all."

The big man smiled. "That's right, Cush—an' some small profit, besides. Don't lock up, yet. I'll be back. Got to step over to my cabin a minute." He returned shortly, lugging the heavy packsack. One by one he tossed the forty-nine moosehide sacks onto the bar. "Weigh 'em up, an' credit me with them, too."

One by one, Cush weighed the sacks, setting down the weight of each on a piece of paper, when he finished he added the figures. "An' you make a profit of thirty-nine hundred an' twenty ounces," he said, sourly, "on payin' that woman twenty-five thousan' dollars fer a hundred pounds of fool's gold!"

Black John's smile widened. "Thirty-nine hundred an' *thirty* ounces," he corrected. "Don't forget them ten ounces I win off'n you on that bet!"

The Story Tellers' Circle

In the Tradition

ISN'T it more than just a coincidence that the British, from then until now, so to speak, have produced so many outstanding writers of adventure? Breathes there a soul so rare (illiterate might be the word) that he has not thrilled to the purple experiences of Sherlock Holmes, Nayland Smith, Bulldog Drummond, Fu Manchu and so many others? From the tiny Isles men have gone forth along adventurous paths that have criss-crossed the globe through the centuries. By their side have been the likes of Robert Louis Stevenson, Kipling, Conan Doyle, Edgar Wallace, Sax Rohmer, E. Phillips Oppenheim and other masters.

You've caught on that this preamble is by way of introducing our latest serial and its author. Barry Perowne introduced himself to us by admitting that he "was born in England thirty-eight years ago," and in our opinion "The Tilted Moon" is written along the lines of a great national tradition in journalism. If it needs a Latin to write a lament, a Russian to write a tragedy, a Frenchman to compose martial airs and a German to produce grand opera, it *certainly* takes an Englishman . . . whoa! We won't go that far. Let's say you don't have to be a

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Britisher to write rattling good adventure. But it helps!

The Gunman's Boss

"WHEN a boy," writes Caddo Cameron, "I rode my pony over some of the ground covered by Mister Gunman and Blaze in this story, 'A Gunman's Partner,' for we moved to that country in 1903—four years before Oklahoma statehood. I have camped the Cross X wagon on the upper reaches of Wild Horse Creek not far from the present townsite of Marlow, near the Chisholm Trail. When the Rock Island came through in 1892 a station was established there and named after a family that had lived in the vicinity off and on for years. The five Marlow boys—Boone, Epp, Alfred, Charley and George—were either outlaws or badly mistreated citizens, depending upon whom you were talking to, and they shot their way through the history of The Nations and Northern Texas as controversial figures except in one respect—no one ventured to question their courage and fighting ability.

"Naturally, our opinion of the Marlows was influenced by local tradition favorable to them. When big cattlemen accused them of raiding trail herds, shoving the stuff into timber and holding it there a few days, then returning it and collecting a reward for the recovery of strays, their friends and neighbors swore these were lies told by the big men in their war upon the little fellows. Be that as it may, the Marlows attained the pinnacle of human courage in two episodes that occurred in Northern Texas, which I shall briefly describe.

"In January, 1889, four of the Marlows were in jail at Graham, Texas, in a small cell shackled in pairs—Charley and Alfred, George and Epp. A mob of forty men gained entrance with the announced intention of taking them out and hanging them. With nothing but a piece of water pipe in the hands of Alfred, the Marlows dared the mob to come into the cell. And got away with it, too!

"A few days later the prisoners were being moved from Graham to Weatherford at night in an ambulance with one guard, followed by two vehicles in which rode a Deputy Marshal and six more guards. They

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were ambushed by a mob. Charley and Alfred Marlow escaped from the ambulance, hobbled to one of the guards' carriages, jerked a revolver from the Deputy and a rifle from another. Meantime, George and Epp caught one of the mob who ventured too close and took his rifle and revolver. These astonishing things happened while they were under fire and shackled together.

"The Marlows then shot it out with the mob and, some say, with the guards as well. Casualties were high on both sides. Alfred and Epp were killed early. Though shot to pieces and chained to their dead brothers, George and Charley went on fighting until the mob had enough and ran off. Afterwards they took a knife from one of the dead guards, cut themselves loose and escaped.

"Although it differs in some particulars from stories I've picked up here and yonder, the best and most authentic-sounding treatment of the Marlows that I ever ran onto is to be found in William MacLeod Raine's excellent book, (We think it is excellent—Editor.) 'Famous Sheriffs and Western Outlaws.'"

Caddo Cameron

Voodoo

"MURDER TALKS OUT LOUD" about a lot of things, says Neil Martin, author of this latest Henry Pou caper. For instance, it's well known that the hex or spell goes over big in the bayou, from which, it seems, Monsieur Henry Pou never roams very far.

Says Neil Martin:

"That *gris-gris* business mentioned in the yarn isn't as far-fetched as some readers may believe. A *gris-gris* may be anything—a human effigy, a feather from a black rooster, the hair from a black cat pulled at the dark of the moon, or what have you. Moreover, more people, white as well as black, here in the Deep South, are addicted to the practice of voodoo than local boosters care to admit. As a matter of fact, more than one drug store in New Orleans carries select lines of voodoo specialties, which are dealt, usually, from under the counter.

"Among the Negro (wanga) doctor's stock in trade are the following 'remedies.' For instance, there is Adam and Eve root, for married couples desiring offspring. Then there are 'get together drops' for bashful lovers. John the Conqueror root is guaranteed to make its possessor irresistible to the fair sex. Queen Elizabeth root is warranted to attract a multitude of suitors to any lovelorn spinster. Love Powder, Sacred Sand, Dragon's Blood and Controlling Powder are said to have the same effects, regardless of the sex of the user. Finally, there is the celebrated 'Goofer Dust,' which is dust collected from the inside of an old tomb, and which is said to be especially potent if gathered on St. John's Eve. However, I suspect that any other dust, collected under any other circumstances, would be just as efficacious."

Neil Martin.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946, of SHORT STORIES, published twice-a-month at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1948. State of New York, County of New York, ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared William J. Delaney, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the President-Treasurer of SHORT STORIES, Inc., owners of SHORT STORIES, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946 (Section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations), printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, SHORT STORIES, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.; Editor, D. McIlwraith, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.; Managing Editor, None; Business Manager, William J. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

2. That the owner is: SHORT STORIES, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.; William J Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

(Signed) WILLIAM J. DELANEY, President.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 28th day of September, 1948.

[Seal]

(Signed) HENRY PAUROWSKI.

Notary Public, State of New York. Residing in Bronx Co. No. 16, Reg. No. 51-P-9. Cert. filed in N. Y. Co. No. 77, Reg. No. 180-P-9. My commission expires March 30, 1949.

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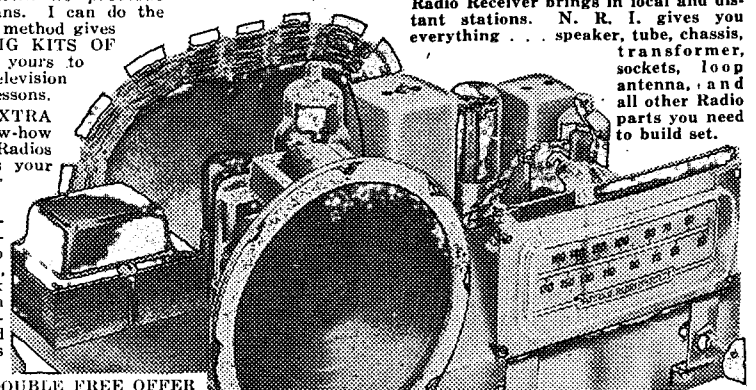

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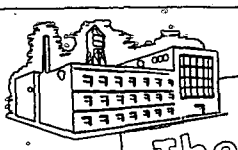

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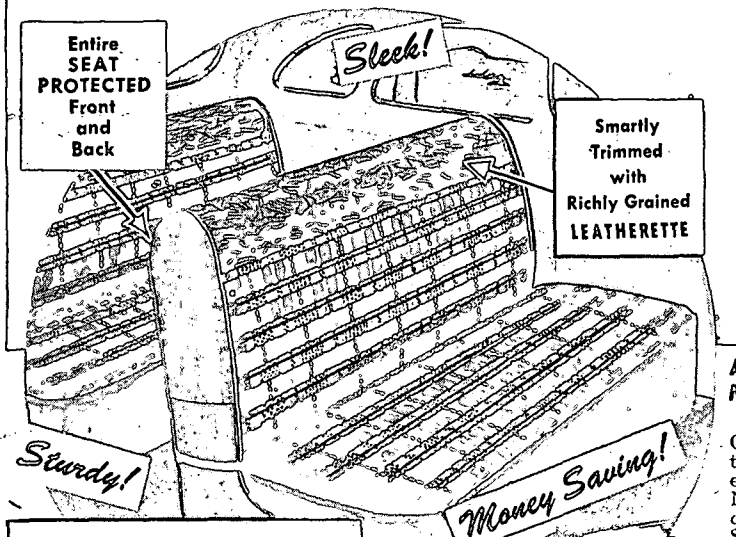

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